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# **Post-liberal agency:**

## **Decolonizing politics and universities in the Canadian Arctic**

Darcy Leigh

Doctor of Philosophy  
University of Edinburgh  
2015

# Abstract

In this thesis I theorize possibilities for post-liberal forms of political agency. Actors seeking to resist, refuse or rework liberalisms' myths and violence are faced with a paradox. How to act against or in-spite-of the terms of political action themselves? Engagement with liberal narratives of political agency risks simply repeating their logics. Refusals of those logics risk being erased by them, if such a refusal is even possible. There seems to be little room for agency either way. This problem is further complicated by liberalisms' diverse local contingencies and, nonetheless, the persistence of liberal political rationalities across contexts. Monolithic accounts of liberalisms buy into their universalizing logics. Approaching liberalisms as endlessly adaptable and malleable, however, misses their significance across contexts and echoes liberal voluntarism. Turning from agency to resistance offers one way to refuse liberal narratives of political action, but also reduces action to a negative and binary relation. How, in this light, might we imagine 'post-liberal' forms of political agency? How might we navigate and rework this set of problems?

Taking political agency to be imagined and enacted locally, in situ and in practice, I draw on three years of praxiographic fieldwork with actors in higher education projects in the Canadian Arctic. In Canada, liberal logics and practices have justified and enacted colonization. The liberal settler state has reorganized and regulated politics, eroding Indigenous forms of government. Formal education has been central to this process and to liberal state-building in Canada. The thesis shows how, for those seeking to transform colonial realities, higher education is now a way of inhabiting, contesting, and reworking the meaning of political agency itself. Working closely with two university-building projects, I show that anti-colonial northern educators locate their agency not in one form of action or another, but in the dynamic interrelation of multiple forms. These actors are also concerned centrally with the ontology and spatio-temporality of particular logics of agency, and they theorize and enact these explicitly. I also show how, in response to these challenges, late liberal versions of political agency are emerging locally. As I tell this story, I examine my own implication in the research problem autoethnographically. I

describe how my struggle to resist colonizing academic conventions from my own institutional setting co-evolved with the activities of participants. I describe how I followed their strategies in negotiating my own agency.

I argue that in old and new universities and in the Canadian Arctic liberal narratives of political agency are latent in unexpected ways. They are also, however, often inhabited deliberately and creatively by local actors. These liberal logics of action are characterized by specific ontologies and spatio-temporalities, which they share with settler-colonialism. Settler-colonialism and liberalisms therefore intersect through these logics in higher education. I locate possibilities for post-liberal agency on this emerging and late liberal terrain. Post-liberal agency can, I conclude, be imagined in the interstices of this multiplicity of forms of agency, in the spatio-temporal and ontological practices of the everyday, and in the intersection of liberalisms and settler-colonialism in the university. My version of post-liberal agency is also, I propose, a way of decolonizing research as well as framing and practicing academic work and ethics more broadly.

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# Acknowledgements

People from pretty much every corner of my life contributed to this research over the course of five years. My supervisors, Dr\* Andrew Neal and Professor Richard Freeman, were central to the development of my research, my intellect and myself during that time. Andrew taught me how to think, write and theorize in the ways that I do. He kept me accountable to my intellectual roots and hopes, even when I was yet not able to articulate these fully. Richard reminded me to get excited about ideas rather than strategic about my career and he got excited about those ideas with me. He was also relentlessly confident on my behalf. Eventually I gave in and accepted his gift of belief in the future and in myself. Andrew and Richard worked creatively and ambitiously with me at every level of the research process. They also showed me that it is possible to lead rich and fulfilling academic and personal lives simultaneously. Thank you Andrew and Richard for all these ways we have related. I hope there are many more still to come.

My examination by Professor Cynthia Weber and Dr Sharon Cowan was a fantasy of what higher education might be. They pushed me to my limits intellectually and politically, while also validating and uplifting me. I know our discussions will be pivotal in whether and how this thesis goes out into the world beyond the PhD. Thank you for making the climax of this journey everything it could be.

Dr Maddie Breeze, Dr Kathleen Ward, Dr Victoria Loughlan, Hilary Cornish, Dr Catherine-Rose Stocks-Rankin and our extended feminist family taught me the many meanings of ‘fierce’. Esje Stapleton and I shared endless early mornings and existential crises over the meaning of liberal agency. Thank you all for crying, laughing, learning, plotting and resisting with me. Thank you for walks, dinners, pep-talks and radical honesty. Thank you for reading and improving my work in countless ways. Nothing I could say here could do justice to the roles you have played in this project and my life.

Many more people in the School of Social and Political Sciences at the University of Edinburgh shared their insight and energy with me over the course of my time there. Professor Fiona Mackay was a generous mentor, institutional feminist hero and ‘space-invader’. Dr Elizabeth Blomberg, Dr Liliana Riga, Dr Sara Dorman, Dr Philip Cook, Sue Renton and all my students have shown me the value of dedication to pedagogy. Ellen Asquith, Dr Holly Davis, Dr Andrea Salter and Dr Xavier Guillaume were excellent coffee and corridor companions. My office-mates in both 6.14 and 4.16, the Materials and Practice crew and Femjoyers all provided essential community and a glimpse of the academia we all dream of. Dr Ewen McIntosh, Dr Kostis Kostagiannis and Ines de Oliveira offered solidarity and inspiration as we approached the finish line together. The School of Social and Political Sciences itself provided funding. Beyond Edinburgh, participants in the workshops *Foucault and Postcolonialism*, *What is Coalition?* and *Politics in Times*

*of Anxiety* shaped my thinking and project. Thank you all for making my doctoral work not only possible, but also fun and fulfilling.

My mother, Dr Linda Thompson, supported me in more ways than I knew possible as I worked on this project. She started by doing her own undergraduate degree and then PhD, as a single working mother, when I was a child. If she had done that then I knew I could do this. She always 'got it'. I absolutely could not have done this without her. While no-one will ever be worthy of my mother, Wolf Dietrich made her happy, welcomed me into his home and solved every IT issue I threw at him. Thank you, Mum and Wolf, for your unwavering support.

Harry Giles provided equally vital support, encouragement and inspiration from all directions in the last two years of the project. Our conversations stretched and developed my understandings of politics, agency and myself. Ideas developed between us and travelled off down our very different modes of expression and engagement in the world. Often this happened as we walked many strengthening miles or cooked an equally strengthening dinner together. Nothing was too big or too small for our creative attention. Harry also helped make this thesis readable and convincing despite my ongoing derision of his grammar obsession. Thank you, Harry, for all this. I cannot wait to see what else is to come.

Katherine Macmahon gave me consistent kindness, patience and friendship. Stevie Williams taught me about play, silliness, creativity and techno. Auld Reekie Roller Girls, MTS, Paula, Jamie and Arthur's Seat all built up my physical and emotional capacity. Oscar showed me the impossible depths of care and joy, as well as some of my own strengths and limits. Dr Hannah McGregor and Kelsey Wrightson provided hospitality and hilarity during my research trips. Thank you all for keeping me grounded, alive and nourished. Thank you also to all the queers, anarchists, feminists and socialists I have been lucky enough to know. You have made me question what the hell political agency is anyway and care really hard about the answer.

Last but definitely not least, participants in the Akitsiraq Law School and Dechinta Bush University welcomed me into their classrooms, boardrooms, homes and lives. They gave me the enormous privilege of experiencing Northern landscapes, urban and rural, through their eyes. I hope I might one day be even a fraction as courageous, generous and dedicated as they were in our encounters. I learnt the most, perhaps, from students at both projects. Akitsiraq Director Anne Crawford taught me as much about friendship, family and ways of being in the world as she did about education. Dechinta visionaries Dr Stephanie Irlbacher-Fox, Dr Erin Freeland-Ballantyne and Dr Glen Coulthard shared their wisdom about research, leadership and the North. Eloise Spitzer and Rob Mitchell invited me into their home and lives. A whole body of work by scholars and activists of decolonization, resistance and transformation, many of whom I have not yet met, kept me both inspired and accountable. Thank you all.

\*I have titled people in these acknowledgements because many of these titles are (inadequate) markers of struggles and growth I undertook with their bearers.



Map of Northern Canada  
Government of Canada, 2014



# 1. Introduction

*I thought about that new American President's speech, where he talked about a 'Great Society.' He talked about 'progress without strife and without hatred.' At the same time he also said 'to reject any among us who seek to open old wounds and rekindle hatreds.' I wondered if everybody realized what he was talking about, and how white people, even here in Canada, went by that. I mean about rejecting people and stuff. I knew he talked about the blacks or any people that upset the fake idea about a 'great society'. I thought about all the history books and stuff at school and in movies. How it was like that, a fake, while really the white people wished we would either be just like them or stay out of sight.*

Slash, teenage protagonist and narrator,

(Armstrong, 1998: 36)

Jeanette Armstrong's novel *Slash* is a fictional biography of an Okanagan Indian in Canada nicknamed Slash. Slash's life story is a story of politicization. Throughout the novel, he becomes increasingly politically active and aware. This process is not linear, however, and much of the text is dedicated to Slash's doubts and questions as to what Indian politics even are or should be. What does it mean for an Indian to become 'politicized' when politics are understood as and regulated by the liberal democratic state? When liberal democracy and states came to North America with colonizers and justified settler-colonial violence? Slash cycles through many possible answers to these questions and does not come to any single conclusion. During his life, he watches his elders continue to live traditionally from their gradually eroded land without protest. He watches his leaders don suits and ties (becoming "brown, white men," [Armstrong, 1998: 69]). He joins his peers in living through racist state-schooling and then through cycles of alcoholism and imprisonment. He experiences peaceful and violent protests, endless meetings and

frustrations, and more. All the while, Slash tries to find his place in this varied anti-colonial activity. He also tries to figure out the place for this activity in creating the justice and freedom that he imagines for North America.

In the quotation above, Slash responds to a speech that he hears in a priest-run youth group, the site of much of his teenage learning. In this scene, Slash recognizes the liberal dream or myth of equality and peace (“fake ideas”) is built on violence, an invisible occupation, and the repression of dissent. But he also recognizes that even though he has “seen through” these “fake ideas”, he is still faced with a very real choice: assimilation (“be just like them”) or erasure (“stay out of sight”). Much of his daily life at school and then later in prison and work is about negotiating this choice on an everyday and interpersonal level. He is book-smart and wants to learn and succeed at school but because he is Indigenous teachers either dumb-down their teaching with him or feel threatened by his success. School has changed him enough so that he cannot get comfortable in his traditional home, but not so much that he wants to or even can assimilate fully into the dominant settler culture. He drinks to forget his own suffering and that of others, but he knows drinking contributes to furthering that suffering. He wants to protest the unjust imprisonment and violence against Indigenous people but is afraid of being subject to it himself. The traditionalism of his elders does not seem like quite enough, but the American Indian Brotherhood that is leading Indigenous activism sometimes feels too white or too far removed from the traditions that they are supposed to be fighting for.

Slash, like all scholars and activists of decolonization, is faced with an agency problem. The very reality against which Slash is struggling also sets and regulates what types of activities and logics count as political action. Engagement with the liberal democratic state risks repeating its colonizing logics. Refusal to engage the dominant version of political action, however, risks being erased and ineffectual in relation to it. Refusal might not, however, even be possible because Slash is already personally entangled with the settler state. There seems to be little room for agency either way. Scholars and activists of decolonization, as well as of

resistance, transformation and liberation more generally, have long been concerned with the problem faced by Slash. This is what Judith Butler calls the “paradox of subjectivation”: “the subject who would resist such norms is itself enabled, if not produced, by such norms” (Butler, 1993:15). This problem is also why Audre Lorde interrogates the possibilities of “dismantl[ing] the master’s house” with the “master’s tools” (Lorde, 1984). In this thesis, I call this problem the ‘erased or erased’ problem. From very different theoretical and personal co-ordinates, Butler, Lorde, Slash and I are all asking: how can we act against or in spite of something which sets the terms and meanings of action itself?

This problem is particularly acute with liberalisms because of their prevalence in articulating political agency and freedom in, from and with the West. This thesis is about how this agency problem is constituted, negotiated and reworked in late liberalism in particular. Elizabeth Povinelli describes late liberalism as the “form that liberal governmentality has taken as it responds to a series of legitimacy crises in the wake of anticolonial movements, new social movements, and new Islamic movements” (Povinelli, 2011: 25). Late liberalism is particularly developed in settler-colonial states like Canada because these states have faced ongoing challenges from their Indigenous populations. Their responses have involved, centrally, the marriage of neoliberalism and multiculturalism, and the reduction of difference, actors and action to culture, commodity and law (Povinelli and DiFruscia, 2012). This marriage and reduction has occurred through the discourses of recognition and reconciliation (Coulthard, 2006, 2007; Fraser, 2000; McNay, 2008), economic development and capacity building (Bargh, 2007), and the creation of legal mechanisms for Indigenous self-determination such as land claims and self-government agreements (Irlbacher-Fox, 2009). The function of this marriage and reduction has been to enable the “truths” that underpin liberal versions of politics to go undisturbed (Povinelli, 2011:26). These truths include liberal narratives of agency and the autonomous subjects (Povinelli, 2011:13), juridical or economic power (Foucault, 1978, 1991) and linear-progressive temporalities around which they operate. This thesis is about how people engage, contest and attempt to rework these conditions for their own political agency.

In this introduction I begin by outlining this problem as it has been established by critical and queer theory. Critical and queer scholarship constitutes the grounds, imperatives and approaches for the current thesis. I explain why I have called the problem ‘agency’, how it manifests in late liberalism specifically, and why I have theorized and responded to it with something called ‘post-liberal’ agency. Liberalisms present, I argue, a series of dilemmas and paradoxes for the possibilities of imagining agency in any other way. In the first section, I also explain why I approach this problem empirically by working in the settler-colonial Canadian Arctic with anti-colonial educational actors. Liberal versions of politics, settler colonialism and universities are, I argue, inextricably entangled and especially so in the Canadian Arctic (which, following participants, I also refer to as ‘North’). This entanglement is the empirical ground of the current thesis.

In the second section of the chapter, I describe the settler-colonial contexts and anti-colonial cases with which I worked “praxiographically” (Mol, 2002:31-33) in the course of the project. These were higher education campaigns and projects in Northern Canada. I worked particularly closely with two projects, Akitsiraq Law School (‘Akitsiraq’) and Dechinta Bush University (‘Dechinta’). Akitsiraq was a law school for Inuit that aimed to combine Inuit law with Canadian common law in the Arctic. Dechinta aimed to combine conventional university pedagogy with place-based pedagogy ‘in the bush’. *Slash* was on Dechinta’s core reading list and students and staff returned to *Slash*’s story repeatedly to make sense of their own anti-colonial activities. In this introduction I focus on the broader historical and political contexts and struggles within which Dechinta and Akitsiraq are located.

In the third section of this chapter, I move on to outline a further dimension of the problem. As an academic actor and a white British person I am implicated in the problem I am discussing. I found myself faced with my own agency problem. I had to navigate, from a very different direction, the same liberal, settler-colonial and academic logics and practices with which Northern actors were grappling. In the third section of this chapter, I introduce this ethical and methodological problem as a

focus of the thesis. This problem can, I argue, be framed and navigated concretely by learning from research participants' own strategies, and through 'post-liberal agency'.

## **1.1 Why agency, post-liberal and settler-colonialism?**

The central goal of this thesis is to imagine a post-liberal form of political agency that reworks and navigates the limits and paradoxes presented by liberalisms for political action. In this section, I lay out what these limits and paradoxes are. I describe the contingent, mythological and violent qualities of liberalisms, along with the limits of resistance and alterity as ways of avoiding the problems of liberal political agency. These are the imperatives and challenges for the current thesis. These dilemmas are also, I go on to describe, manifested and further complicated in the contexts of settler-colonialism, the Canadian North and education. I argue that conceptualizing and researching agency empirically and locally is one way to begin the task of re-imagining the meaning of political agency in these contexts. While I begin by talking about liberalisms and settler-colonialism separately, therefore, this is in order to lay the grounds for their connection. Similarly, while I talk about classical liberal, liberal democratic, multicultural and neoliberal rationalities and practices I do not mean these are separate and successive forms of liberalism. Rather, they are all entangled today in late liberalism. Even post-liberal agency is not 'after' liberal agency or removed from these dilemmas but rather operates with and on the same terrain.

### ***Liberalisms and political agency***

The terms 'liberalism' and 'neoliberalism' are now used in so many places, cases and ways that critics have accused them of becoming meaningless. Kathleen Fitzpatrick, for example, denounces the "utterly sloppy and nearly always casually derisive way in which the term [neoliberalism] is of late being thrown about" (Fitzpatrick, 2012). James Laidlaw and Jonathan Mair argue that the concept of

neoliberalism is so overused in academic work that it has become an “obstacle to understanding” and “obsession” (Group for Debates in Anthropological Theory, 2014). In my experience it is true that the words ‘neoliberalism’ and ‘liberalism’ are difficult to escape, particularly in the critical and queer traditions in which I work. It is also true that these words take on different and shifting meanings, and that their referents take on equally different and shifting forms. For me, however, this does not make the terms meaningless. Quite the opposite: I would argue that the “obsession” of contemporary scholarship with forms of liberalism reflects the persistence of liberalisms in social and political life today. The slipperiness of the concept of liberalism reflects the adaptability and heterogeneity of liberal logics and practices. Liberalisms are as multiple and concrete as the many other features of modern life with which they intersect and interact, such as the state, nation and capitalism (Foucault, 2004, 2010; Harvey, 2005). It is for these reasons that liberalisms matter and that critical and queer scholars, myself included, are indeed ‘obsessed’ with liberalisms.

Here I introduce the contours and salience of the problems presented by liberalisms for political action and agency, as established by critical and queer scholars. My aim is not to engage with this theoretical literature beyond using it to identify a problematic and rationale for the current project. I devote the entire next chapter to engaging theory more fully. I also devote space in that chapter to considering the liberal logics that are under critique here and to showing how liberal narratives of political agency emerge and vary in classical, neo- and late liberalisms. For now, however, it should be sufficient to note briefly that liberal logics of political agency are often “autological” (Povinelli, 2011:13), juridical (Foucault, 1978, 1991) and linear-progressive. This means they assume an autonomous economic or legal subject acting deliberately towards a future goal in linear time. This subject acquires and wields agency like a tool. Action is often understood in legal, economic or institutional terms. My aim here is not to reduce liberalisms to a single story or monolithic whole. In this thesis I show that autological, juridical and linear-progressive narratives of agency are remarkably persistent, but that they also vary across the collection of diverse, local and often hybrid practices, myths and effects that constitute liberalisms. Nonetheless, I have singled out this narrative of agency

here because, as I will describe, it is this narrative that participants in the current research were often seeking to resist or rework and which often crept back into efforts at acting otherwise.

Critical and queer scholarship has long been concerned with exposing the falsehood of the universal, autonomous, rational and individual liberal actor. Michel Foucault, for example, “create[s] a history of the different modes by which, in our culture, human beings are made subjects” to show, far from being universal, the subject has been invented and imagined historically and contingently (Foucault, 1982:77). Foucault’s contingent subject does not acquire and exercise agency on the world, but rather is an agent who is produced by, productive of and inseparable from the world. Similarly, Judith Butler uses poststructuralist and psychoanalytic theory to argue that subjects and actors are, in fact, created within discourse, not prior to it, through “the iterability of performativity” (Butler, 1990: xxiv). Again, for Butler agency is not acquired and exercised, but rather occurs in the very process of iteration and especially in its interruption or failure. I describe liberal and counter-liberal accounts of how agency works in depth in the following chapter. For now, what is important is that one way critical and queer scholarship has critiqued liberal narratives is by saying that agency simply does not work in the ways liberal accounts say it does.

While liberal narratives of agency do not accurately represent the world, they still have effects in it. Critical and queer theory has been equally concerned with the effects of liberal narratives and the ways in which they control, oppress or are violent. There are far too many of these ways to list here, so I will give just two examples of particular relevance to the current thesis. John Locke is widely recognized as a grandfather of modern liberalism. Locke explicitly rationalized slavery and colonialism, tying liberal accounts of politics to the violent dispossession and subjugation of Indigenous peoples (Locke, 1980:19; see also Losurdo, 2014). Today, neoliberal logics of marketization and privatization continue to drive and justify environmental destruction on Indigenous lands (Altamirano-Jimenez, 2014:13-15; Smith, 2005). This violence is another reason that liberalisms and their alternatives matter.

Critical and queer scholarship has also shown liberalisms to be hugely diverse and, nonetheless, connected and persistent across both time and space. Against liberalisms' universalizing tendencies and claims, Elizabeth Povinelli articulates liberalisms as a heterogeneous "symphony" (Povinelli, 2011; see also Richardson's *Contending Liberalisms* [2001]). That is, liberalisms take myriad, varied and adaptive forms. Despite this heterogeneity, or perhaps because of it, liberal logics of action repeat persistently and recognizably. Often they reappear precisely in practices that seem at first glance, or at conception, to be anti-liberal alternatives (as in Margot Weiss's account of BDSM practitioners' attempts to create a counter-culture using neoliberal practices and logics, for example [Weiss, 2012]). Perhaps this persistence is due to the impossibility of an outside (Walker, 1992), exterior (Foucault, 1978:95), prior (Butler, 1993:21), or other form of total escape from liberalisms. Liberalisms' heterogeneity, their persistence, and the lack of an outside, together complicate any single or straightforward theory of liberalism. They also complicate any single or straightforward theory of resistance or alternatives to liberalisms.

Scholars and activists concerned with political action that does not repeat liberalisms' violence, or by actors not visible (or even existent) in liberal logics, have turned instead to the politics of resistance. Positive and productive political agency has become so tainted by liberalisms' myths and violence that critical and queer theorists, myself included, have often shied away from identifying action as anything more than 'against'. It certainly feels easier and safer to say that action is not something than that it is something. Nobody can be accused of prescription or of buying into dominant political logics that way. The turn to resistance is also a response to the impossibility of alterity in the form of an "exteriority" (Foucault, 1978:95), outside (Walker, 1992), or "prior" (Butler, 1993:21). The impossibility of escaping modernity, discourse or in this case liberalism has been underscored repeatedly by critical and queer scholarship. In the settler-colonial context, however, denying incommensurable Indigenous or other forms of difference further totalizes liberalisms and repeats one of the core functions of late liberalism (Povinelli, 2002, 2011; see also Cruikshank [2006] and Nadasdy [1998:25–43] for discussions on commensurability and academic knowledge). Nonetheless, the limits of my own



liberal location when it comes to imagining post-liberal agency are a recurring theme in this thesis.

I absolutely do not want to discount the necessary work and action that has occurred under the banners of resistance or alterity. Nor do I want to discount all the very real risks in discussing political agency specifically. These risks are recurring themes and obstacles in this thesis. Nonetheless, as Saba Mahmood argues, reducing action to the binaries of oppression/resistance, consolidation/destabilization, signification/resignification, iteration/subversion or even liberal/alternatives presents a new set of problems (Mahmood, 2012:20-22; see also Louis McNay on “the dichotomous logic of domination and resistance” [McNay, 2000:155]). Each of these pairs is another set of binaries, when binary thinking is one of the targets of queer and critical politics in the first place. Binary thinking is a target of these politics because it is a feature of modernity and liberalisms. This set of binaries, in fact, defines action entirely in direct reference to that which is being resisted, thus potentially reinstating rather than challenging its primacy. These binaries also, Mahmood argues, foreclose any possibility of “norms” being “performed, inhabited and experienced in a variety of ways” (Mahmood, 2012:22). That is, agency gets reduced to opposition. Similarly, Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick calls purely oppositional critical theory “paranoid” and argues that binary theory risks homogenizing both so-called oppression and resistance (Sedgwick, 2003:123, 123-152). Again, opposition is a powerful and sometimes necessary analysis that I do not mean to reject here. Rather, I want to highlight its limits. I also want to align the current project with the concerns in which the politics of resistance and alterity are grounded, if not with the focus on resistance and alterity themselves. As I have said, I go more deeply into this scholarship and theory in the next chapter. For now, I mean simply to begin to frame the question of agency for the current thesis as being haunted, limited and motivated by oppositional thinking.

In this thesis, I take these points made by critical and queer scholars as imperatives and grounds from which to ask: What are the possibilities for imagining a post-liberal agency? These points also indicate a series of either/or dilemmas when it comes to understanding and responding to liberal agency: as heterogeneous and/or

persistent, as mythological and/or creating effects, as inescapable and/or incommensurable with existing alternatives, from within and/or against and as resistance and/or positive action. Theorizing post-liberal agency means engaging these dilemmas. In this thesis I show how anti-colonial actors in the Canadian North are currently reworking and navigating these problems in practice. I argue that we can learn from them in order to theorize post-liberal agency.

It is currently, I believe, uniquely opportune to ask questions about the meaning of political agency. We are witnessing an emerging and ongoing set of political struggles which are contesting the meaning of politics and action themselves. Pussy Riot, Occupy, Anonymous and #idlenomore are some particularly visible examples. Critical and queer scholarship has been concerned with these struggles too and has been particularly engaged with the ways in which failure and negativity might be forms of political agency that do not align directly with liberal logics (Halberstam, 2011; Ahmed, 2010; Berlant, 2011; Edleman, 2004). Concurrent to these challenges to liberalism are a series of responses, reassertions and adaptations by local liberal orders. These responses included, for example, the commodification of sexual difference and individualization of sexual agency (Weiss, 2012), the pursuit of happiness (Ahmed, 2010; see also Berlant, 2011), self-help (Rose, 1998:156, 166; see also Rimke, 2010) and environmental governance (Pellizzoni, 2011), to name just a few. The land-claims, self-government agreements, truth and reconciliation commissions, and discourses of cultural recognition with which late liberal settler-states have met Indigenous demands for self-determination and decolonization are also examples of these responses and the focus of this thesis (Povinelli, 2002; Coulthard, 2007).

Povinelli calls this “terrain of struggle” “late liberalism” (Povinelli, 2011). This struggle is constituted by attempts to enact non-liberal forms of political agency and by liberalisms’ adaptations and reassertions in response. That is, late liberalism is characterized by actors contesting the meanings of political action and agency. I therefore take late liberalism as a unique and pressing site for examining how liberalisms work at their shifting and varied limits, as well as locating possibilities for reimagining or reworking political agency beyond those limits. As such this

thesis is as much a contribution to understanding how liberalisms work today as it is an attempt to re-imagine political agency.

My approach to conceptualizing and researching political agency in the current thesis is empirical. I draw the premise that agency can and should be researched empirically, locally and *in situ* from two sets of literature. The first literature is critical international relations scholarship, which shows how the meaning of politics is socially constructed. What counts as politics is, this literature demonstrates, imagined and regulated contingently and practically. This happens in the very activities of politics themselves and is closely entwined with ideas and practices of social order more generally. Critical international relations scholars have been especially concerned with documenting how politics are articulated and regulated as the nation, sovereignty and the state. This scholarship follows Foucault, who argues that what counts as politics is not fixed, but rather is tied to particular rationalities and historical moments as well as to wider societal processes (Foucault, 2004, 2010). Jens Bartelson, for example, shows how the state and sovereignty have emerged historically as sites of politics (Bartelson, 1995, 2001). Rob Walker (1992) and Karena Shaw (2008) show how the state and sovereignty continue to regulate ideas about what count as politics. Roxanne Doty and Cynthia Weber both show how sovereignty and the state are performed in everyday micro-practices and how politics are regulated as and by them (Weber, 1995; Doty, 2007; see also Biersteker and Weber, 1996). In this thesis I take late liberalism to be one such historically and contingently constituted mode of politics. In order to understand late liberalism I draw on accounts of scholars who approach politics and liberalism in the Foucaultian way described here.

The second literature to which my empirical approach is indebted is that of critical theorists who show that agency too is contingently constructed and meaningful. Quoting Talal Asad, Saba Mahmood explains: "...the meaning of agency must be explored from within the grammar of concepts within which it resides... we should keep the meaning of agency open and allow it to emerge from 'within semantic and institutional networks that define and make possible particular ways of relating to people, things, and oneself'" (Asad, 2003:78 in Mahmood,

2012:34). Agency in this line is something which occurs and can only be understood locally, contingently, *in situ* and in practice. This approach to agency aligns with queer studies and critical anthropology, both of which are committed more generally to working with actors to understand their worlds, rather than analyzing, representing or interpreting them (Weiss, 2011). I review scholarship which approaches agency in this way in Chapter 2 and show how these epistemological and ethical rationales for studying agency empirically have demonstrated their capacity for generating new theoretical understandings of social life. For these reasons in this thesis I approach political agency empirically as it is understood, manifested, negotiated and contested in its specific and everyday locations. I now turn to why I do this in the context of settler-colonialism, the Canadian Arctic and higher education.

### ***Settler-colonialism***

This thesis is about agency in late liberalism. It is motivated by liberalisms' violence and mythology and by the desire to think critical and queer action beyond resistance. This task is complicated by the challenge of recognizing liberalisms' heterogeneity while also taking seriously their commonalities and persistence. The thesis is also empirical because it takes agency to be constituted contingently and locally. For all these reasons, the thesis is a study of how political agency is manifested and contested in and around the late liberal settler-state and the politics of decolonization specifically. More specifically still, the thesis is an account of a movement to create a university in the Canadian North. This is the empirical ground for the thesis because, as I describe now, settler-colonialism, the North and education all combine to constitute a unique and acute version of the agency problem in late liberalism. They also offer, I found, compelling ways of rethinking the problem and therefore contributing theoretically to the critical and queer project to rearticulate political agency more broadly.

Patrick Wolfe defines settler-colonialism as the simultaneous destruction of Indigenous peoples and construction of settler states and societies (Wolfe, 2006; see also Strakosch and Macoun, 2012). In the first instance, what Wolfe calls the "logic of elimination" involves the removal of indigenous people from their lands (Wolfe,

2006:387). Elimination happens either physically (as in genocide or relocation) or socially by the eradication of the difference and therefore existence of Indigenous peoples (as in cultural assimilation) [see also Smith, 2005:36]. At the same time the construction of settler-colonial states, societies and power relations occurs through the very same processes that enact this elimination. For example, the processes of settling or colonizing Indigenous land through agricultural, military, legal, religious and economic activity all work simultaneously to eliminate Indigenous people physically or culturally by confining them to reservations or absorbing them into those institutions. These same activities also work to create the settler institutions and identities of which they are part.

Central to the logic of elimination is the reorganisation and regulation of multiple, varied Indigenous modes of government in order to replace them with dominant settler, state and liberal forms of government (Maaka and Fleras, 2005; Tully, 2000; Smith, 2005; Alfred, 2005). This also means replacing the forms of being, knowing and acting that are attendant to modes of government. Indigenous people have repeatedly faced the ‘erased or eraser’ agency problem: act on the terms of the liberal settler state and be assimilated, or refuse them and be erased. Classical liberal notions of progress, rationality, enlightenment and civilization motivated and legitimized early colonial contact and forced cultural assimilation (Shaw, 2008). Later, neoliberal logics of the market and economy fuelled and authorized the exploitation and commodification of Indigenous lands and cultures, as well as the incorporation of Indigenous peoples into the market as workers (Bargh, 2007). Today, as “liberal governmentality... responds to a series of legitimacy crises in the wake of anticolonial... movements” late liberal logics neutralize Indigenous claims to different modes of politics and order by reducing them to “culture”, making them commensurable with the settler-state, and channeling challenges through state mechanisms for inclusion, recognition and liberal-democratic self-determination (Povinelli, 2011:25; see Coulthard [2009] for more on Indigeneity and recognition; see McNay [2007] and Fraser [2000] for these functions of recognition in general). The account I give in this thesis shows that in the Canadian North, settler-colonialism and late liberalism are two sides of the same coin and are organized in part around the same versions of political agency.

Liberal logics are especially visible in the Canadian Arctic. The North is imagined as variously a space of exploration and discovery, the home of the Indigenous other, in need of economic development, an abundance of natural ‘resources’, a strategic site of security and sovereignty, and is increasingly governed by state mechanisms for Indigenous politics (Grace, 2007). Education has been the central technology through which liberal paternalism and liberal progress have been implemented, the settler-state has been built and maintained, citizens have been produced, and Indigenous peoples have been assimilated into liberal democracy (Miller, 1996; Steckley and Cummins, 2001; Henderson, 2008). Late liberal logics have also been driven by Northern events and Indigenous peoples. As I describe below, this includes negotiating the world’s largest land claim agreement (Loukacheva, 2007), as well as locating Indigenous agency in Indigenous people’s rights to sell, manage or profit from land and natural resources (Bargh, 2007). Today, as I learnt from my fieldwork experience, the North is full of white do-gooders, adventurers and prospectors of various kinds and is therefore reminiscent in many ways of an early frontier town. Colonial frontier settlements were where early liberalism was imagined and enacted, but also where liberal logics met their limits and others.

Settler-colonialism therefore presents a version of the agency problem for those seeking to transform colonial realities. Liberal forms of politics, on the one hand, offer voice but risk further colonization and assimilation. Refusing those forms, on the other hand, risks erasure and ineffectiveness. This has, in turn, produced a fierce debate amongst scholars and activists seeking to act against colonialism as to what that action should look like. Participants in one cluster, the ‘resurgence paradigm’ (their label), argue that late liberal (and all state) forms of political action are inherently colonizing and assimilating (Allen 1998; Alfred 2005; Smith 2005; Irlbacher-Fox, 2009). Those in the other, the ‘constitutional’ or ‘liberal’ paradigm (my labels), argue that these politics are in fact a socially constructed entity and therefore open to social intervention and potentially Indigenous inclusion (Borrows, 2002, 2010; Ladner, 2005; Assembly of First Nations, 2014). In fact,

scholars and activists in the constitutional paradigm argue that Indigenous people have already had roles in shaping the late liberal state. The Government of Canada also situates itself within the constitutional or liberal paradigm. It seems like there is no room for anti-colonial action either way. As Slash says, “the white people wished we would either be just like them or stay out of sight” (Armstrong, 1998:36).

This is where the ‘post’ of post-liberal agency comes in. Post-liberal agency is the question mark around which I attempt to theorize a form of agency that is motivated by and takes into account the realities of late liberalism that I have described in this section. These realities include those critiqued and documented by critical and queer scholarship, as well as those of settler-colonialism and the Canadian North. ‘Post’ serves a number of functions in this task. It signals a desire for some other form of political agency than that offered by late liberalism. This desire is motivated by critical and queer accounts of the violence and mythology of liberalism, as well as the struggles of anti-colonial actors in the politics of decolonization. At the same time, ‘post’ captures the persistence and inescapability of liberalisms. ‘Post’ is not non-liberal or anti-liberal as these would return to an outside or to binary thinking again. Instead it indicates some relationship to liberalism that is more than simply opposition.

This use of ‘post’ is more than a theoretical commitment, however. It also resonates with the ways in which actors in my fieldwork theorized what they were doing. Rather than locating their own agency as *either* in liberalism and the state *or* in authentic Indigenous alternatives (which may not even be possible), Northern educators frequently understood their agency to work in more than one way simultaneously. They also located their agency in the interstices or relations between multiple forms of action or narratives of decolonization. ‘Post-liberal’ is intended to capture these multiple and relational forms of agency at work in the late liberal context of my research. The ‘post’ that I learned from the activities and perspectives of participants in this research therefore responds to but is not fully determined by liberalisms. It takes seriously the risks and imperatives of the dilemmas I described above but does not buy fully into their either/or logics.

I want to make two brief notes of clarification regarding my use of the term ‘post-liberal’. First, I use ‘post’ in the way in which, in my reading, it is used by poststructuralist and postcolonial scholars: not to mean ‘after’ liberalism, but to mean ‘in response to’ and ‘embedded in’ liberalism. Of course, ‘post’ does signal ‘after’ in everyday usage, and this carries some risks and tensions for the current project. These risks are exacerbated because, following Northern educators, I am concerned in this thesis with the colonizing functions of linear-progressive temporalities and narratives of decolonization. I discuss these tensions around temporality throughout the thesis. Second, scholars in Peace and Conflict Studies use the term ‘post-liberalism’ to describe what is happening in post-conflict settings where liberal state-building or liberal peace-building has been attempted and failed or been challenged (Richmond, 2011; see also Richmond and Mitchell, 2011). The Canadian North is not conventionally understood as a ‘post-conflict’ setting. The North does, however, share much in common with places that are understood as such. While this thesis is not located in or speaking to Peace and Conflict Studies directly, my approach is certainly aligned with its ethical and epistemological commitments, and I do draw on this scholarship at times to better understand state-building and development in the Canadian North.

The single aim of this first section is to give readers a sense of the layers and complexities of the agency problem that is under scrutiny in the current thesis. How to imagine political agency beyond liberal logics, when those logics have long defined and regulated the meaning of political action? What possibilities, as well as traps, are presented by the “paradox[es] of subjectivation” (Butler, 1993:15) in late liberalism? These questions are motivated and complicated by critical and queer theorists’ accounts of liberalisms as violent and mythological as well as contingent and persistent. They are motivated and complicated by the necessities and limits of focusing on resistance or alterity. Rather than fix this problem in any given moment or form, I have shown some of its many iterations across contexts. In this thesis I argue that engaging with the specifics of these iterations in the settler-colonial Canadian North, where the agency problem is uniquely and acutely manifested, can create understandings and possibilities for the question of political agency more broadly.



## 1.2 Contexts and Cases

*Maybe that schooling wasn't good for you. Maybe you're spending too much time down in the village. Maybe you want more and more to be like some of them other boys down there. Maybe you think they are happier than you or that they are luckier than you. Well, that ain't true. They are pitiful because they have nobody to teach them good things. Their moms and dads are all pitiful. They got broken spirits from going to residential school. Lots of them died when they came home, from drinking and T.B. sickness. The ones that made it okay, made it learning how to please the priests and nuns and rejecting everything Indian. They were praised for that. That's how they are. They put the white man way up high above Indians and listen to them, and try to please them. We pity them.*

Slash's dad to Slash after Slash quits school,  
(Armstrong, 1998:52)

This is one of many passages from *Slash* about the significances and complexities of formal, state-run education in Indigenous life in settler-colonial Canada. Throughout the book, Slash describes how his understanding and hatred of colonial power as well as his uneasy sense of self are both formed in school. Slash sees school as way in which colonization happens and the settler state is produced. At the same time his own subjectivity and perception of this process are in part contingent on his experience in school. In this section, I introduce this entanglement of formal (higher) education, political action, and decolonization as the empirical context for the current thesis. I show how formal education embodies Patrick Wolfe's "logic of elimination" (Wolfe, 2006:387). I also show how education is one way in which the late liberal state is constituted performatively (as described by Weber [1998] and Doty [2007] above). I argue that both of these functions of education involve articulating and regulating political agency as liberal agency. These functions also make formal education an ongoing site of anti-colonial action. This action includes, I argue, attempts to contest or rework the meaning of political agency itself.

State-funded and run education was introduced by colonizing powers in Canada. The initial and explicit aims of early residential schooling were to civilize and assimilate savages, to shepherd them into inevitable cultural extinction, to reshape them into citizens – to “kill the Indian in the child” (Government of Canada, Hansard, 2008; see also Llewellyn, 2002: 255). Indigenous children were forcibly removed from their families and communities and taken to residential schools. In these schools, European norms, religion and languages were enforced, while Indigenous languages and traditions were banned (Miller, 1996). Formal education itself, in fact, is a European cultural practice that was imported into Canada. Indigenous pedagogies are generally not separated out into a specific time, space, or into disciplines, but rather embedded in daily life and guided by elders and the material environment (Tester and Kulchyski, 1994). The Government of Canada recognizes that “90% to 100% [of residential school students] suffered severe physical, emotional, and sexual abuse” (Truth and Reconciliation Commission, 2014). Today, the former students of residential schooling frequently suffer from post-traumatic stress disorder and alcoholism, beginning a cycle of violence which is still felt strongly in Indigenous communities.

These functions of education were central to the colonial reorganization and regulation of politics around the liberal state. Scholars of nationalism have documented the roles of formal education in imagining emerging nations and states (Hearn, 2006:80-84; Guibernau, 2007:30-31; Gellner, 2009:33). Foucaultian educational scholars have shown how formal education produces individual citizens and workers (Ball and Juneman, 2012: 140). Education in the Canadian North specifically made Indigenous people more amenable to liberal state governance (e.g. by giving them surnames or insisting they live in houses rather than nomadically [Tester, 2006]). Education in the North also channeled “appropriate” Indigenous individuals into government (Henderson, 2008:58). In fact, the generation of Indigenous activists who first became ‘politicized’ in the terms of the state met and organized in residential schools, using the understandings, language and tools they had acquired there.

The aim of assimilation has officially been dropped from education policy. However formal education in Canada remains a product of this history and is treated with skepticism in Indigenous communities. Due to its role in connecting Indigenous peoples and state politics, it also remains a key site of Indigenous politics (whether resisting those connections or facilitating them). Today, many Northern and Indigenous activists and leaders say formal education is necessary in order to empower Indigenous people to participate in the legal, bureaucratic and governmental structures they have created towards the end of self-determination. They are trying, at the same time, to Indigenize and formal education. Coupled with the colonial history of formal education in Canada, the use of educational strategies in pursuit of decolonization makes education a tricky and paradoxical area of activity in Canada.

Participants in the current thesis were navigating these historical and ongoing functions of formal education in the Canadian North. In researching this thesis I worked with actors in higher education in particular. I chose higher education for two key reasons. In the North, higher education is currently the object of an intense contestation: a movement to create a university in the North, and a struggle over what a university in the North would even look like. This contestation is an opportunity to see the stakes, fault lines, limits and possibilities of political action in education. At the same time, because of their maturity and age, higher educational actors tend to be more explicit in theorizing their politics and what they are doing. Their need to do so is heightened in the context of the current contestation and their positions of still-imagining a university. There is not already an institution with a local colonial history as there is with schooling. I go into detail as to the rationales of my case selection and my analytical relationship with them in Chapter 3. I now give some background to this higher education movement, and to the fieldwork sites and contexts for the current thesis. I show how these sites are microcosms of the debate over decolonization in late liberalism that I describe above.

In 2009, the Walter Duncan Gordon Foundation (‘the Foundation’) commissioned and published a report titled, *Dialogue Towards a University in*

*Canada's Far North* (Stevenson, 2010). The Foundation is a national philanthropic organization which, at the time, claimed to be concerned with promoting Canadian sovereignty and security in the North, via the development of Northern communities (it has since called its use of “security as a bargaining chip” a “failure” [Lajeunesse, 2013:2]). The movement for a Northern university had been gaining momentum since 2008, and the Foundation sought to consolidate this movement, map its progress, and point to future directions. In November 2010, the Foundation hosted a conference by the same name (*the Dialogue*) in Yellowknife, the capital of the Northwest Territories. The conference brought together a range of interested parties from Territorial Governments, Indigenous organizations, academia and educational projects and initiatives, with the aim of discussing what a Northern university would look like and what action could be taken in pursuit of one. When I talk about the creation of a Northern university or Northern higher education, I am talking about the cluster of events, actors, ideas, activities, projects and interactions I describe in this section. There is still no permanent university in the Canadian Arctic.

Post-secondary education in the North has historically been the domain of the Territorial Colleges. Territories and Provinces are the units of Canadian federalism. The Territories, which make up Northern Canada, are deemed by the Federal Government not yet sufficiently developed to have the same level of powers and autonomy from the Federal Government as the southern provinces. The Territorial Colleges are dominated by vocational courses. Hairdressing and jewellery making are, for example, particularly popular courses at Nunavut Arctic College (jewellery-making is in part an Inuit traditional practice and therefore differently meaningful to hairdressing in the context). More recently the Colleges have been attempting to expand into more academic courses, collaborating with degree-granting programs and taking on some university-like functions such as publishing books by and for Northerners. In our interview, the then President of Nunavut Arctic College told me that it was the expectation and intention of the Colleges that they would expand to become universities, under the direction and supervision of the Territorial Governments.

The main sessions of *the Dialogue* were led by representatives of the Governments and Colleges. A second group of attendees, however, organized what they called a “visioning session”. Participants in the visioning session were education activists from across the North, including from the Akitsiraq Law School Society, the Illituvik University Society (activists in Nunavut working for a university), and the individuals who would later create Dechinta Initiatives. These actors are the primary participants in the current thesis. The Colleges and Governments were, however, excluded from presenting at this session. In a later interview, one of the session’s organizers explained to me that this decision had been controversial and had provoked hostility from the Colleges towards these smaller projects and actors. She explained that the rationale for this was that, being state-backed, the Colleges already had a platform that others did not. She also explained her own reticence around the Colleges leading the conversation around a university or attempting to become a university themselves. The Colleges’ close relationships with Government and their emphasis on vocation did not lend themselves to the critical thinking and decolonization she hoped a university would enable and inspire. She was worried that the colleges were mainly oriented to producing docile workers and citizens, much like the more well-meaning and benign versions of colonial schooling. This opinion was repeated to me across my interviews with participants in the visioning session.

Tensions between the Colleges and alternative visions of education also persisted across my interviews and fieldwork engagements. In fact, implicit and explicit struggles and conflicts between different educational actors were overwhelming features of my fieldwork experience, especially over who or what was the most Northern, most Indigenous, most decolonizing, and what kinds of relationship with the state were most appropriate. Frequently I found myself being pulled in multiple directions, with interviewees denigrating other educational projects. Locally, then, what Northern post-secondary education should look like and who gets to articulate it was highly contested. It is these local actors and contestations that I worked with in my fieldwork. Through this work I learnt that the contestation was so heated because its stakes were what politics, decolonization and

self-determination actually meant – who can exist, speak or act and how. As actors configured and reconfigured the relations of state, Indigenous politics and education in their activities and our conversations, they theorized their own political action and agency, in and in relation to the agency problems presented by the late liberal settler-state and formal education.

Education in the North is a small field and many actors play multiple roles. It was impossible to draw lines around any single case, and I interviewed a range of actors and stakeholders in Northern education during my fieldwork. As I said above, however, I worked particularly closely with two projects: the Akitsiraq Law School and Dechinta Bush University. Both of these projects were part of the visioning session and highly critical of the dominant paradigm of formal education in the North and of education's roles in colonialism. The two projects were created by groups of Northerners forming a Society, which then partnered with a Southern university to deliver an accredited, "Northernized" (Akitsiraq Law School Society, 2012) degree program, "run by Northerners, for Northerners" (Dechinta Initiatives, 2012), in the Arctic. Both Dechinta and Akitsiraq sought to redirect the legitimacy and resources of Southern institutions to Northern ends and values, and to give Northern students access to university credits that they might not otherwise have. They were engaging explicitly with and attempting to rework the theory and practice of power and government, as well as the form and production of knowledge. They are also shared in common majority Indigenous populations, vast landmasses, remoteness, colonial histories, cold and snow, mineral resources and similar economic and governmental set-ups, amongst many other things.

Despite all these commonalities, Dechinta and Akitsiraq were also distinctly different. Dechinta was in the Northwest Territories, on Dene land; Akitsiraq was in Nunavut, on Inuit land. Each land had its own set of cultures and traditions, as well as politics and relations with the Canadian state. Dene are "Status Indians", governed by the 1879 Indian Act. The Indian Act originally excluded Indians from citizenship and organized them into "Bands" with councils and chiefs, with the intention that these state-recognized governance structures would replace previous Indigenous

ones. What has actually happened is that there are now competing political authorities in Indigenous communities (Irlbacher-Fox, 2009:13-18; see also Dickerson, 1992). Alongside these Bands, in 1970 Dene created the Dene Nation and the Indian Brotherhood of the NWT, both of which articulated a nationalistic and somewhat adversarial case for Dene self-determination and possibly independence from the settler state (Watkins, 1977). In 1969 a white paper proposed the abolition of the Indian Act (and therefore Indigenous difference in law in Canada). Indigenous activists responded with a “red paper” and with intensified activities which drove the eventual creation of land claims and self-government policy in Canada (Cairns, 2000:67). Engaging with this new legislation, NWT Dene fragmented into several regional legal campaigns for land claim and self-government agreements (Irlbacher-Fox, 2009:13-18). Today, there is a tiny 50.4% Aboriginal majority in the NWT assembly, although not all of this is Dene. This minority exacerbates the need to assert aboriginal or national rights beyond majoritarian democracy in order to secure the legitimacy of Indigenous voices. For all these reasons, divided and aggressive politics are often the context, norms or necessities of Indigenous politics in the NWT. That is, they align more closely with the resurgence paradigm of decolonization.

Inuit in Nunavut, on the other hand, have never been Indians legally. They have been recognized as Canadian citizens since the beginning of the Cold War, when having citizens in the High Arctic became strategically useful for asserting Canadian Arctic sovereignty and that area came under international scrutiny (Tester and Kulchyski, 1994). Arctic colonization, and a formal relationship between Inuit and the state, occurred during this period, much later than in the NWT. As such, organized Inuit politics (activism and resistance in recognizably state terms) have also emerged later and have mobilized Inuit inclusion as citizens and Canadians, as well as lessons from prior Indigenous and state activity elsewhere. Inuit have negotiated one big land claim (the Nunavut Land Claim Agreement [Government of Canada, 1999]) and a parallel political accord rather than multiple claims. In 1999 the political accord split the Northwest Territories to create the Territory of Nunavut. This split changed the constitutional configuration of Canada. The new Territory of Nunavut had an 86% Inuit population.

Nunavut's new elected public Government in its capital, Iqaluit, reflected this majority. Inuit control the government by virtue of their electoral majority. The Agreement, negotiated and signed as a contract with the Crown, assigned ownership and management of much of Nunavut's lands and natural resources to Inuit. The Agreement's implementation has since been overseen by Nunavut Tungavik Incorporated. The Agreement also contained cultural clauses: according to Article 23 Nunavut's public service must be population proportionate (i.e. 86% Inuit) and Inuit culture and values must be implemented in all areas of governance. In all these ways, Inuit politics are often unified, conciliatory and practiced through Canadian nationhood and citizenship rather than against it. That is, they align more closely with the liberal and state paradigm of decolonization.

I do not want to suggest that different relationships with the Canadian state are the only reasons for differences between these two locations. I especially do not want to ascribe agency only to the state by excluding more inward-looking reasons, such as culture or tradition, for the forms that politics and identities take. Inuit and Dene participants in the current project repeatedly pointed to cultural differences and historical conflicts between the two peoples as in part driving their choices of political action (they also highlighted similarities and complexities between the two peoples and regions). Of course, internal identities, norms and traditions will have a great sway on how both groups practice politics. I am not, however, in a position to know or say what these internal features are. It is the entanglement of liberal logics of action, the state, colonization and education – not Indigenous culture – that is under scrutiny in this thesis.

These contexts and differences between Nunavut and the NWT run through Akitsiraq and Dechinta themselves. Akitsiraq was conceived of and created by a group of legal professionals in Nunavut called 'the Akitsiraq Law School Society'. Their aim, they state, is "to graduate competent Northern lawyers" and "to create a critical mass of Inuit lawyers in Nunavut" (Akitsiraq Law School Society *et al*, 2007). They see themselves as "lawyer-making in the Canadian Arctic" and "making Inuit lawyers" (*ibid*). The Akitsiraq Law School was therefore, at first glance, a 'working within' type of approach to politics: qualifying Inuit to practice law will



provide them with tools and enable them to work within the state system towards social change and Northern and Inuit self-determination. In my encounters and interviews and in the classroom there was very little ‘us and them’ or fighting talk, few sharp lines, and a pride in being Canadian and in the roles that Inuit have played in Canadianness. In fact, the Akitsiraq Law School Society locates the Law School right at the heart of late liberal logics and mechanisms of self-determination. The letter, spirit and logic of the Land Claim, they argue, mandate the qualification of Inuit lawyers to take up roles in the new Government. The drive for self-determination itself requires it. Thus far the Society has assembled and run only one full cohort of the program, from 2001 to 2005. They were ready to launch a second cohort in 2010, but the Government of Nunavut withdrew its crucial portion of the funding in 2009. Since 2009 the Society has been working to demonstrate its rationale for Akitsiraq to the Government and general public, as well as hosting other legal education events and short courses. Its members also participate in discussions and an ongoing campaign for more post-secondary education and a university in the Canadian North.

Dechinta, on the other hand, is grounded in a sharp critique of colonization and how it is entwined with the settler-colonial state and university knowledge. Dechinta explicitly aims to both practice and teach or theorize decolonization and indigenous self-determination. The bush university is therefore much more openly political than Akitsiraq and uses a more aggressive language. One of its slogans, for example, is “arm yourself with knowledge”. Like Akitsiraq, Dechinta is also struggling for funding and also running other sorts of courses – primarily short courses on Indigenous leadership with high fees to generate funding. Dechinta is also, however, managing to continue running semesters in a very precarious way. Students at Dechinta read the scholarship in the resurgence paradigm that is skeptical of the possibilities of late liberalism for Indigenous agency. The authors in the resurgence paradigm teach at and have driven the creation of Dechinta. Akitsiraq, on the other hand, has been shaped and taught by scholars in the constitutional, liberal paradigm of decolonization scholarship.

These differences also inform the daily pedagogical arrangements and practices of the two projects. Most Akitsiraq programming resembles the classroom-based learning that most readers of this thesis will be familiar with. It happens in Nunavut's capital Iqaluit in a room at Nunavut Arctic College, at desks, with a whiteboard and a lecturer standing at the front. It requires reading and writing – perhaps especially so due to its focus on law. Akitsiraq is aware and critical of the links between conventional pedagogy and colonialism and does differ in its unusual community-determined admissions criteria, its demographic, its emphasis on oral communication, its location, and its Elder-in-Residence. I discuss these in Chapter 5.

Dechinta, on the other hand, is located in the bush and looks very different to a Southern university classroom. Students live on-site for six weeks and instructors are flown in. Throughout the day, students might hunt, fish, or make camp, led by two local elders. Weather is a significant determining factor here. Each course is co-taught between a university professor and an indigenous elder or other local leader – combining indigenous and academic knowledge. 'Courses' are not separated out from life or each other, however, but are woven into each other and into the day. Students read texts, like *Slash* and also much of the decolonization theory I draw on in this thesis, and write assignments. They then relate these reading and writing tasks to their practical and lived experience in the bush. This combination of bush and university practices is not remotely a smooth synthesis of pedagogies, and I discuss its tensions and their significance in Chapter 6.

When I talk about the projects in this thesis, however, I am talking not just about their programming, but at least as much about their advocates, their organizational and institutional set-ups and processes, and participants' hopes and aims. These parts of the movement for a Northern university often happened outside the classroom. Participants explained, analyzed and promoted their projects in publicity, in bids for funding and recognition, in board rooms and meetings, in emails, and in coffee shop conversations. It is in these contexts outside of classrooms that participants most often, openly and fiercely discussed how they understand their own projects as modes of decolonizing political agency and action. It is in these

institutional and informal settings that I worked primarily, and in which I participated as a PhD researcher, research assistant, tutor and friend, during multiple trips over the course of three years. In these ways the current project resembles both an institutional ethnography (Smith, 2005) and an educational ethnography (Ball, 1994:1-13). My approach is primarily informed, however, by praxiographic (Mol, 2002:31-33), genealogical (Foucault & Rabinow, 1984) and autoethnographic methodological traditions, which I describe in detail in Chapter 3.

My aims in this section are two-fold. First, I introduce the empirical contexts and cases for the current thesis. My hope is that the reader is now able to imagine, at least in part, what I mean when I say ‘Akitsiraq’ or ‘Dechinta’, and also to have some sense of what Indigenous politics in northern Canada involve. My second aim is to show that these contexts and cases are iterations of the late liberal agency problem I described in the previous section. The functions of education in producing and regulating the meaning of politics has, I have argued, made education a key way in which anti-colonial and Indigenous actors are seeking agency as well as contesting the conditions for their own political action. The resurgence and constitutional paradigms can both be seen to weave through Northern Indigenous politics in general and higher education specifically. Dechinta and Akitsiraq might be seen as aligning with the resurgence and constitutional paradigms of decolonization respectively. Ultimately, however, neither project is fully determined by this division. Both projects are, for example, participants in the visioning session and opposed to the state’s hold on the Colleges. They interact with each other and perceive each other as allies across the contested divide between state and resurgence modes of politics. This is one tiny and introductory instance of the central argument of this thesis. When faced with the problem of their own agency, participants in Northern education do not subscribe fully to one form of agency or another. Although they have leanings, they are not wholly aligned with either liberal or resurgence narratives of anti-colonial political action. Instead, they articulate and practice a multitude of different forms all in relation to each other.

## 1.3 Ethical action dilemmas

*“Research” is probably one of the dirtiest words in the indigenous world’s vocabulary.*  
(Smith, 1999:1)

*What should we do?*

*Asked frequently, and in many different settings, it is important to understand that, as an honest, engaged question, there is nothing wrong with it. However, if the question is a dishonest one, then it only serves to perpetuate all the negative aspects of colonial Settler society...*

*Here, the more direct question is actually, ‘How do I restore comfort to myself?’*

(Barker, 2010 :321)

The roles of academic research in colonization, and visa-versa, are well-documented. Academic researchers have repeatedly romanticized, homogenized and denigrated Indigenous peoples (Francis’s [1992] *Imaginary Indian* catalogues these; see also Berkhofer’s [1978] *White Man’s Indian*). Political theorists have theorized the meanings of politics and social order against Indigenous others (as in Locke [1980:19] and Rousseau, [1968]). Politically authoritative disciplines like Politics, History and International Relations have excluded Indigenous voices and truths, relegating them to fiction in Literature or culture in Anthropology. This exclusion is exacerbated by the dominance of written over spoken forms of knowledge. Indigenous ontologies and epistemologies are often oral. The spoken word is more than a practical way of creating a text but also captures cyclical and diffuse conceptions of time. These temporalities are linked to an emphasis on the changing seasons, which provide the backdrop to much Indigenous life and are the focus of much Indigenous history (Gill, 2002:89). This approach is often dismissed by non-Indigenous academics and politicians as unreliable and inaccurate, with the changing

of times and dates between tellings of a story ostensibly invalidating them as modes of knowledge production (Godard, 1990:149; Hoy, 2001; Shoemaker, 2002).

Indigenous ways of knowing, being and speaking have therefore been excluded from academic knowledge and the political knowledge that academia informs. At the same time, academic knowledge forms often align with autological, economic, juridical and linear-progressive liberal logics of action. Academic knowledge forms are autological when they assume that knower (actor), knowing (action) and knowledge (outcome) are separable. They are linear-progressive in this sense as well as in their emphasis on writing and enlightenment. They are juridical in their bureaucratic contexts and emphasis on formal qualifications as well pedagogy as 'knowledge delivery'. Academic knowledge forms are economic, as Joanna Williams (2013) describes, when education is articulated and operates as a market commodity. When I examine the daily spatio-temporalities of Akitsiraq and Dechinta in Chapters 5 and 6, show how all these colonizing and liberal aspects of pedagogical, administrative, research and knowledge practices connect in the everyday realities of universities.

This historical entanglement of academic work and colonization is the subject of many critiques and histories. I do not wish to repeat it here. Rather, I first want to point out that the way in which universities and colonization are entangled implicates me, a white academic, in the problem I am studying. This implication is further complicated in the current thesis by the complicity of academic norms in liberal logics of politics and action. I am working, therefore, within the entanglement of liberalisms, colonization and universities. I am connected in this way with research participants. I discuss the entanglement of liberal agency, academic work and colonial power empirically in Chapter 3. In this section I explain that, for these reasons, one of the aims of this thesis is to explore the ethics of doing research with and in Indigenous communities, especially for non-Indigenous people. I argue that research ethics can be conceptualized as researcher agency, and that researcher agency must be understood in relation to the current neoliberalization of higher education (McGettigan, 2013; Brown and Carasso, 2013; Williams, 2013) and its intersections with colonization. I propose that the relational and multiple approach to

political agency articulated by Northern educators offers a concrete model or practice for doing ethical academic research. Following participants, I am also consistently concerned with the spatio-temporalities of the action of the research process, hence highlighting their significance above.

My brief description of colonizing academic conventions above implies that research is performative. Research in part “enacts or produces that which it names” (Butler, 1993:13). The performative potential of research means that researchers must recognize that what they do will have effects and, I believe, be concerned with the politics and ethics of those effects. However, in order for knowledge to be performative it cannot simply state a desired reality. Knowledge must resonate sufficiently with an existing reality in order to be effective (Butler, 1993). Performative research ethics therefore involve a careful balance or relation of the real, the desired and the possible. This balancing act was a constant struggle for me in researching and writing this thesis. I wanted to resist and rework the colonizing academic conventions of which I am part. Yet I also wanted anti-colonial arguments and Indigenous politics to get taken seriously as politics in the authoritative disciplines of politics and IR. This meant appealing to those same colonizing conventions for legitimacy. Legitimacy was a problem faced by Northern educators too, which I explore in depth in Chapter 5. As one Akitsiraq Law School Society member put it, “We want legitimacy, but we don’t want too much”.

Whether to pursue legitimacy or to refuse convention was the first of a series of either/or binary choices I was faced with in the first year of my PhD. That year I also became especially preoccupied with whether I should face ‘out’ towards the Indigenous, anti-colonial, non-liberal and alternative projects and communities I encountered, or ‘in’ towards myself and the colonizing liberal institutions I am part of. I was particularly concerned not to claim to represent anyone, not to judge the success of their efforts at self-determination, and not to deconstruct or expose them in any way. Not only was this not my place to do, but from a performative perspective, deconstructing decolonization struggles seemed to be to weaken rather than support them. I was also concerned not to appropriate Indigenous realities for my own ends. So I turned inwards: I could speak for myself and I could deconstruct

the late liberal state. This, however, erased Indigenous action and agency from the picture and re-centred the white liberal subject and context, which after all is what that early colonial work had been busy constructing. For a while I decided I could not do the project at all. Next I decided I had an ethical obligation to do the project as a person who benefits from colonial, liberal and state forms of power, and who would reinscribe them simply by ignoring them. Returning to the project, I decided I had to focus squarely on Indigenous agency – that this would affirm that agency, and open up possibilities rather than close them down.

This description of my thinking and shifting orientation in my first year is an autoethnographic snapshot of a central theme of the thesis. Like anti-colonial actors in the North my decisions seemed at first to be framed by these binaries. Ultimately, however, my intention is that the value and effects of this thesis are not in one approach or another, but in the dynamic relations between them. I also found myself faced with some of the same liberal conditions for action and authority in the university. The same neoliberal logics that are reordering Indigenous communities (Altamirano-Jimenez, 2014; Bargh, 2007) are also reordering academia in the UK and globally (McGettigan, 2013; Rodger and Brown, 2013; Williams, 2013). In this way, I found my ethical problem co-evolved with the agency problem faced by participants. I followed participants' approaches in navigating my own agency as a research in an academic context that I shared with them. For these reasons my methodology has an autoethnographic component and I document my ethical struggles throughout the thesis.

Through this documentation I highlight the uses and limits of existing ethics strategies in Indigenous contexts. These include the widely used post-structuralist practices of positionality, identity, reflexivity, introspection, silence and deference. My work is very much informed by the same spirit and critiques from which they are drawn, and I used all of them at some point in the course of my research. However, when read through the context of Northern higher education and its participants' critiques of late liberalism, these strategies were also shown to be sometimes aligned inadvertently with the logics they sought to refuse. I conclude that post-liberal

agency can provide a new and productive framework for thinking about and practicing research ethics more generally.

## **1.4 Thesis narratives**

The form of the thesis mirrors its substantive emphasis on interconnection and relation, as well as my ambivalence regarding linear-progressive academic conventions. These conventions and my reservations are noted above and elaborated in Chapter 3. Structurally, the thesis works two ways. You can begin here and work your way through to the end through successive and chronological elements of the research process: literature, background, methodology, the cases and analytical discussion. I have written it this way in order to perform my own grasp on and intelligibility within academic norms and to demonstrate this thesis is worthy of legitimacy in the form of a PhD. I discuss the intersections of this strategy with the spatio-temporalities of liberalisms and ethics more fully in Chapter 3.

At the same time, threads of agency weave between contexts, people and events, and can therefore be picked up and followed as they weave back and forth throughout the text. No chapter or section manages to contain or fully cohere a single type of action. Each breaks down and draws on or spills over into the next. One overall effect of the thesis in either reading is to show that, for higher educational actors in the Canadian North, there are multiple forms of agency at work and that these are variously co-constituted, connected and interacting. Another effect is, following participants' concerns, to illuminate the specific ontological and spatio-temporalities of particular versions of agency, and their relations. What I mean by this should become clear in the rest of this section.

In Chapter 2, I review current critical and queer literature that draws on Michel Foucault and Judith Butler in theorizing and documenting forms of agency, both liberal and otherwise. This is the primary intended audience for this thesis and the primary literature it draws on. I describe exactly what I mean when I say 'liberalism'. Liberalism is not a fixed theory or structure, but a heterogeneous, persistent and adaptive set of events, processes and practices, as I indicated above. I



show how others have critiqued liberal narratives and paradoxes of agency, as well as how they have responded or created alternatives to it. Finally, I highlight the shared empiricism of these scholars and its rationale, locating my own project in this same methodological and theoretical tradition.

Chapter 3 is an account of what I did in the course of the research. My methodological approach is what Anne-Marie Mol calls “praxiographic” (Mol, 2002:31). Praxiography combines an ethnographic sensibility and ethnographic practices with a critique of representational ethnography and a reconceptualisation of research as discursive praxis. My praxiographic work within the movement for a Northern university allowed me to be attentive to multiple constitutive elements of local and messy realities and to follow them where they led, through documents, policy, practices, norms and people. Bruno Latour describes this as “following the actor” (Latour, 2007:11-2). Praxiography also allowed me both to think the theoretical problem of agency through this empirical context and, ultimately, to see that this division was false – that the theory and practice of politics and of decolonization especially are co-constituted and inseparable. Crucially, this empirical work exposed the significance of place, ontology and multiplicity to the actors involved. These were not my starting points but are now central to the argument I have made. In Chapter 3, I describe how I came to the specific cases as well as how I travelled in the North, conducted interviews, reviewed public and private archives, and participated in Akitsiraq and Dechinta in a range of formal and informal ways. I also explain how my approach to research ethics evolved in the course of these activities, and what their implications are for how I theorize ethics in this thesis.

Chapter 4 begins the work of tracing how anti-colonial action articulates and contests political agency. I describe the politics of decolonization in Canada, including how they have come to be so contested and polarized. I describe two narratives of colonization and decolonization – liberal and resurgence – arguing that the emergence of these differences hangs on different accounts of agency and their histories. My telling of this story is inspired in part by Foucault’s genealogy (Foucault & Rabinow, 1984:76-97). The people and books I describe in Chapter 4 are simultaneously the theoretical, political and empirical contexts for the thesis. The

projects I worked with are situated in this political context and draw on these thinkers and theories. Authors from the decolonization scholarship supported the creation of these projects, teach on them and develop their theories through them. They also sat in courts and occupations and participated in anti-colonial politics more generally. There is no clear line between theory and practice in this thesis. This reflects the ontological approaches of its participants, as I describe in Chapter 7. Chapter 4 therefore provides context and begins to document struggles over the meaning of political agency empirically. It also shows how these struggles are framed theoretically in the decolonization debate as *either* liberal *or* anti-liberal, but also how this division begins to break down in practice.

Chapter 5 and Chapter 6 begin with ‘late liberalism’ and ‘place’, and with Akitsiraq and Dechinta, respectively. In Chapter 5, I describe how advocates for a Northern university and members of the Akitsiraq Law School Society understood and enacted self-determination and difference in late liberal terms, and with them autological, strategic and state-bound forms of agency and action. In Chapter 6, I describe how participants in both Akitsiraq and Dechinta located their own agency in place-based forms of authority and knowledge. This division, however, quickly breaks down. Neither chapter sustains a single narrative. Each keeps spilling over into the other, undermining the distinction between ‘liberal’ and ‘otherwise’.

This is the crux of the thesis. Even between seemingly opposed and competing accounts of agency, there are relations. These relations are often mutually enabling. Frequently, one slips or fails, facilitates or co-constitutes with, the other. In Chapters 5 and 6 I indicate where a thread or aside which begins in one gets picked up in more depth in the other. It might then occupy a few paragraphs or whole section, itself with threads and asides which lead back to the other chapter again. These relationships between chapters represent the relationships between the different ways in which participants in Northern education negotiated the terms of their own agency. The two chapters should therefore be imagined as entangled and can be read laterally, in either order. I hope that to some degree this effort and failure to divide the chapters as well as their connection in these ways captures both the weight of the liberal/non-liberal binary and its own limits and false promises.

To close, in Chapter 7, I centre these connections themselves, teasing them out. I focus particularly on their ontological dimension, and on how participants in Northern education are especially concerned with agency on an ontological level. In the story I tell throughout the thesis, agency is: 1. Multiple. It is as multiple as the moments at which it occurs because its meaning is situated in these moments. In any one context, such as those in which I worked, there may be more than one form of agency at work. 2. Relational and dynamic. By this I mean that each version of agency is related to another form of agency. In fact, meaning, and further forms of agency, are located in the relations and interstices of multiple forms of agency. These relations are not static or fixed, however, but are dynamic and emergent. 3. Ontological and especially spatio-temporal. That is, there is an ontological component to any account of agency, and a specific-spatio-temporality. These components can be taken as sites of agency or struggle, as well as of relationality, in themselves. In fact, spatio-temporal norms and practices were particularly focused and deliberate sites of action for participants in the Northern education projects I worked with. 4. In addition, these ways of thinking about agency further problematize how we think about our own agency as researchers in universities.

The implication of all this for thinking about decolonization, is I suggest, is a critique and reframing of the either/or way in which the problem is posed: both ways are necessarily connected. We can look to anti-colonial activities seemingly in opposition beyond those in this thesis and ask whether and how they might also co-constitute or interrelate. This might in turn open up another set of political possibilities as well as moving the question away from ‘which’ and towards ‘how’. Anti-colonial actors are, I show, navigating and reworking the problems constituted by liberalisms for imagining post-liberal agency. They are doing this in practice by relating multiple forms of agency. They highlight the risks of latent liberal logics, as well as the possibilities of inhabiting those logics creatively. They show the ontological and spatio-temporal contours of liberal narratives of agency. This, in turn, points to ontology and spatio-temporality as sites of agency itself, for contesting the meaning of agency, and for further interrogating narratives of political action. Finally, in the Epilogue, I return to the question of ethics and action in the neoliberal university. The forms of agency I articulate in this thesis are, I suggest, also ways to

understand and practice academic work, including but not limited to anti-colonial research ethics. All these features of agency are, I argue, ways of navigating the dilemmas identified by the critical and queer literatures with which I began above. As such, they are grounds from which to imagine post-liberal agency.

### *Notes on Terminology*

The terminology used in this thesis is inseparable from its object of discussion. Laden and clumsy language around Indigeneity is a legacy of the constructed, politically charged and contested histories of the words Indigenous, Aboriginal, native and Indian. It is a testimony to this legacy that despite the large body of literature in the area, the language necessary to deal with the nuances of the situation is still absent. Any existing term is insufficient, while the boundaries between the terms hardly exist. In the course of my fieldwork, I encountered people who shunned any catch-all category in favour of their specific nations or communities (such as Dene or Inuit). I encountered arguments that there are commonalities across a catch-all category, or strength and leverage to be gained through using one single term. Some participants denounced settler words like 'Indian' and 'Eskimo', while others still identify strongly with them and the weight of colonial history. Inuit sometimes jokingly identify with the 'E numbers' tattooed by the state for identification on their arms. Alongside all this, any of these words might be capitalized to show that Indigenous is a proper noun, an identity, nationhood, or an imagined community. The resurgence paradigm uses 'Indigenous', almost exclusively. Alternatively the lower case can be used to naturalize and fix the quality indigenous. The Canadian Federal Government has issued its own proclamation on terminology: Aboriginal with a capital 'A' (Communications Branch, Indian and Northern Affairs, 2002). The variety is endless and each variation comes with its own politics and significance.

In this thesis I use the terminology of the source I am discussing, in reference to the specific categorization of that source, wherever possible. For example, I use 'Indian' with reference to settler sources, and 'Aboriginal' when referring to those of the current Canadian state. I always use the words an individual participant identifies

with, as I have done with the fictional participant Slash above. Often, however, when talking about a group of people this simply is not possible. In these cases I use 'Indigenous'. I use the capital 'I' for the reasons described above. Additionally the word 'Indigenous' is increasingly the norm in academia, with which I am to speak. 'Indigenous' also distinguishes my narrative from that of the Canadian or colonial government, which both use different terms (my hunch is this is also the reason for its prevalence in academic work). If I am honest, perhaps this also reflects my own leanings towards the resurgence paradigm – if for no other reason than to hold myself to account to the harshest critique of my actions.

## 2. Agency beyond resistance

*...all forms of politics require and assume a particular kind of a subject that is produced through a range of disciplinary practices that are at the core of the regulative apparatus of any modern political arrangement.... How does a particular conception of the self require and presuppose different kinds of political commitments? Or to put it another way, what sort of subject is assumed to be normative within a particular political imaginary*

(Mahmood, 2012:33).

This chapter is about what I mean when I say ‘liberal agency’, ‘late liberalism’ and ‘agency’ in this thesis. When I say ‘liberal agency,’ I mean a specific cluster of logics and practices, in which agency is understood as autological, juridical and linear-progressive. The chapter is organized in three sections, each building substantively and theoretically on the next. In the first section of this chapter I describe how these logics and practices operate and repeat as well as vary in what Elizabeth Povinelli calls “late liberalism” (Povinelli, 2011:25). These logics and practices include the universal subject and rational action of classical liberalism, the economic power and values of neoliberalism, and the reduction of difference to culture and law of late liberalism.

In discussing these three accounts of political action and their entanglement my intention is not to give a comprehensive account of liberalism (a project I am not sure is wholly possible, but has been attempted elsewhere [e.g. Losurdo, 2011; Richardson, 2001]). Rather, it is to identify and illustrate the logics I call liberal, with which participants are grappling on the ground, and to which I return repeatedly throughout the thesis. It is also not my intention to use the term ‘liberal’ as pejorative. While I will show that it is the case that liberalisms are bound up in violence (particularly colonial violence), it is not my aim to pass judgment on the strategies of participants in this thesis, liberal or otherwise. Nor is it to speculate on what kind of violence might come with alternatives.

In the second section I turn to critical and queer critiques of these liberal versions of agency as mythological and/or violent. I draw primarily on Michel Foucault (1978, 1982, 1997, 1991; Foucault, Rabinow & Faubion 2000) and Judith Butler (1990, 1993). I am less interested in why liberal narratives of politics and action are ‘bad and wrong’ (this seems now to be a given in critical and queer studies), and more interested in the theoretical and epistemological shifts that either drive or are effects of these theorists’ critiques. I read Foucault and Butler as empiricists. In calling them ‘empiricists’, I do not mean they are representationalists. Rather, I mean they look to people and practices outside of books and abstract theory, and they approach agency as embedded, situated, practiced and therefore varied and contingent. Their ‘critiques’ are in fact accounts of agency practices that undermine the liberal narrative (not abstract criticisms). These accounts show that liberal agency is an idea or theory of what agency is and also an inseparable collection of materials, practices, knowledge, people, relations and processes that constitute the conditions for action at any given moment. It is the theory and epistemology of this literature which become the grounds and methodology of the current thesis. At the end of the second section, I use Saba Mahmood (2012) and Karen Barad’s (2007) engagements with Foucault and Butler to expand their conceptual and methodological approaches and make them more resonant with the settler-colonial contexts in which I worked.

Foucault and Butler have inspired countless scholars to expose the persistence and contingency of liberal forms of agency across multiple contexts, as well as to locate, follow and relate resistant or alternate forms of action (myself included). In the third section, I review some of this work, turning to the central audience for this thesis. I review scholarship which attempts to articulate non-, anti- or even post- liberal forms of political action and which theorizes agency empirically, *in situ* and in practice (Cvetkovich, 2012; Halberstam, 2011; Povinelli, 2011; Mahmood, 2012; Weiss, 2011). I then re-read that same scholarship, to show how liberal forms of agency are diverse and adaptive – as well as re-appearing, persistent and latent, in unexpected moments. This field is populated by studies (generally ethnographies, but not always) of people doing things in specific contexts, and of how those people understand their activities and contexts. The current thesis is

one such study and, I believe, contributes a pressing site of investigation to the conversation.

## 2.1 Late liberalism

The aim of this section is to make clear what I mean when I talk about late liberal agency in this thesis. I describe late liberalism as an entanglement of classical liberal, neoliberal, and liberal democratic logics and practices. I argue that autological, juridical, economic and linear-progressive rationalities emerge and persist across these varied and contingent liberalisms. Today these rationalities constitute the meaning of political action and agency in late liberalism. While I do locate liberalisms and ideas about political agency as emerging historically and over time, I do not aim to give a comprehensive account or history of liberalisms (such accounts, to the extent that they are possible, have been attempted elsewhere [e.g. Losurdo, 2011; Richardson, 2001]). Rather, it is to identify and illustrate the logics, norms and practices that I call liberal in this thesis and with which people are grappling in Northern Canada. This section is therefore a touchstone for the thesis as a whole and I refer repeatedly back to it with the words ‘liberal’, ‘autological’, ‘juridical’, ‘economic’ and ‘linear-progressive’ throughout the thesis.

I have borrowed the term “late liberalism” as well as much of my understanding and use of the term from Elizabeth Povinelli’s *Economies of Abandonment* (Povinelli, 2011). Late liberalism is, Povinelli describes, the form “liberal governmentality has taken as it responds to a series of legitimacy crises in the wake of anticolonial, new social movements, and new Islamic movements,” (Povinelli, 2011:25). It is, she says, the present form of “European and Anglo-American governance,” which has “neoliberalism and multiculturalism,” as “two of its key pillars,” (Povinelli and DiFruscia, 2012:76). Late liberalism is, I argue here, the terrain of struggle with which northern educators operate.

Elizabeth Povinelli is writing from Australia which is a settler-colonial state like Canada. Povinelli’s story is about much more than Indigenous politics and about much more than Australia, but it is these that are of interest here. In Australia,



Povinelli describes how “liberal governmentality,” has responded to Indigenous challenges to its legitimacy by creating late liberal mechanisms for Indigenous self-determination (Povinelli, 2011:25). These mechanisms include the political rhetoric of cultural recognition, as well as legal and economic codification or commodification culture and Indigenous subjecthood. The function of the emergence of these forms of self-determination is, Povinelli argues, to “make a space for culture to care for difference without disturbing key ways of configuring experience – ordinary habitual truths,” (Povinelli, 2011:26; see McNay [2007] and Fraser [2000] for these functions of recognition beyond settler-colonialism).

Povinelli shows that when Indigenous peoples have asserted their own modes of politics, being and knowing against those of the neoliberal settler-colonial state, the state has responded by reducing Indigeneity and Indigenous difference to culture, commodity and legality. Culture, commodity and legality do not ultimately disrupt the neoliberal state, but extend and project its logics. Instead late liberal forms of governance protect the neoliberal and liberal forms already at work in the settler-colonial state from threats to their logics or “ordinary habitual truths,” (Povinelli, 2011:26). This is another expression of the agency problem addressed by this thesis: becoming intelligible within the terms of late liberalism for Indigenous people means becoming reduced to its logics. Late liberal logics are, I will show, also the logics of colonization.

I turn now to examine some of the historical emergence of the late liberal present I have described thus far. To do this I take liberal theorists and events as some of liberal agency’s many constitutive practices. I also draw on scholars who are critical of liberalism as secondary sources who have already documented those practices and their effects empirically. Late liberal logics of action are autological, juridical, economic and have specific spatio-temporal dimensions. I focus on these aspects of liberalisms and their entanglement here. The “autological subject,” is the universal, autonomous and strategic subject of classical liberalism (Povinelli, 2011:13). This actor is autonomous in the sense that he exists prior to the world and to his own action. His action and its object are separable from him. He acts deliberately or rationally towards a particular end. His agency is power that is held or

exercised. I am using ‘he’ here to indicate that the liberal subject is gendered (McNay, 2000:1-30). All these aspects of autological action are divisible and are organized through forwards-motion in linear time. This actor might be chained, his capacity reduced, but he can also be freed, emancipated or enlightened.

Autological action, as described here, is embodied in Enlightenment social contract theory. I take the hugely varied thinkers of Hobbes (1996), Locke (1980) and Rousseau (1968) as exemplary of social contract theory). An already-existing social contractor (the actor) enters into a social contract rationally and deliberately (the action) in order to protect his own interests by creating society (the outcome). Often this is to escape the state of nature (the prior), further extending linear time. Even when the social contract or state of nature is imagined as a thought mechanism rather than a reality, this imagining still relies on the logics of linear and progressive time. Of particular relevance for the current thesis, these enlightenment logics of action have been and continue to be articulated against an Indigenous other or outside (see examples below).

Also of importance for the current thesis, the autological actor within classical liberalism underpinned the emergences of the nation and state. The nation and state, in turn, began to become synonymous with ‘politics,’ and autological actors became citizens (Shaw, 2008). State, nation and citizen were all opposed to Indigeneity, making colonialism, state and liberalism entangled historically. For Hobbes (1996), Locke (1980) and Rousseau (1997), for example, the romantic or barbaric Indigenous “savage” (Hobbes 1996:85) was part of the rationale for the creation of the state, and an opposite against which the civilized European subject was imagined. For these scholars the savage, real or imagined, was ‘prior’ to civilization, and civilization represented progress.

Even if the prior, progress and civilization existed concurrently, they were understood as related successively in linear time. For Locke, the barbaric nature of this “savage,” justified colonialism and slavery (Locke, 1980:19). Locke wrote this justification into his theory of private property and natural rights (*ibid*). Today, judges and politicians still use Hobbes and Locke to justify ongoing settler-colonialism in Canada. Karena Shaw (2008) documents this use by judges. Thomas

Flanagan, a scholar and Conservative politician, uses Locke himself (Flanagan, 2008:42). These are just a few ways in which the autological actor and colonialism, as well as property and the state, have emerged in inseparable relation with each other.

In his *Brief History of Neoliberalism*, David Harvey (2005) shows how autological action and actors have since informed and become reduced to economics in neoliberalism. In fact, all rationality and value has been narrowed to the free market and its associated processes and values of privatization, marketization and productivity (as well, of course, as state regulation) [Harvey, 2005]. If we are good we will earn money which means success, and if we earn money and success this means we must be good. This economic good and system of measurement and explanation functions in similar universalizing and progressive ways to the good of civilization, but it is also substantively different. It narrows the realities attendant to neo liberal forms of governance and the functions of the state to economics (Foucault, 2010). Actors in neoliberalism are still autological, but are now also specifically consumers, investors, workers and so-on. Again, in neoliberal logics the economic worker or consumer might chose to work or buy rationally, acting in linear time. They might also have more or less agency in the form of capital. Subject, action and outcome are here all understood as fixed and separable.

As Povinelli describes, neoliberalism is not external to late liberalism. Neoliberalism is, in fact, one of late liberalism's key pillars. What neoliberal logics mean for Indigenous communities is that all Indigenous successes, failures, voice and agency get reduced to economic logics. For example, they can self-determine by selling their lands or resources (their relationship to land being articulated, by the state, as property). They can protest by suing their governments (as the national Inuit organization does [see Chapter 5]). They can be compensated for colonial wrongs financially (as they are by the Truth and Reconciliation Commission). Indigenous people are also in need of economic development (I discuss this at length in Chapter 5). At the same time, ongoing settler-colonialism is being justified in these same classical liberal and neoliberal logics (Altamirano-Jimenez, 2014; Barge, 2007). Rights to development and/or resource extraction on Indigenous lands are being sold

by governments, while more and more service delivery to Indigenous communities is being privatized. Concurrently paternalistic intervention is being justified on the basis of the lack of economic development (this echoes the civilization argument) [Smith, 2005]. In all these ways, autological neoliberal logics of political action run through the late liberal state narratives of Indigenous self-determination, and bind the liberal state with settler-colonialism. Again, this leads directly to the agency dilemmas of anti-colonial actors in the North.

Finally, in late liberalism, the autological actor becomes the cultural or legal subject. Someone is Indigenous by virtue of their recognition as such by the state. In the Canadian North, for example, the state recognizes people as Status Indians (Dene), Band Members, Inuit, Inuvialuit and Aboriginal. These are all overlapping legal categories. The burden of proof is on the Indigenous person in order to claim the rights granted to them by the Canadian state. Indigeneity in this line is not a different way of being or acting, but simply a cultural practice that can be codified and implemented in law. In the North, culture is observed, written-up as lists of principles, and then applied in the work of government. The Government of Nunavut, for example, has a list of eight Inuit principles it seeks to implement in all its areas of operation (Henderson, 2008:190; see Chapter 6 for a full discussion). Culture can only be, in this light, that which is commensurable with liberal logics. Making difference commensurable by reducing it to culture is, as I have explained, a key tenet of late liberal governmentality. At the same time, power and agency are understood as human rights and institutional capacity. Like culture, rights and capacity are held and exercised like objects by individuals (Kulchyski, 2013 [Kulchyski also argues these individuals are implicitly European]). Human rights are recognized and granted by state and international institutions. Capacity is the ability to act within the terms of those same institutions. As well as being autological, this conceptualization of power and action as state tools that can be acquired, held and exercised is what Foucault calls juridical (Foucault, 1978:89-91). In all these ways, the threads of autological agency run through classical, neo and late liberalisms. In Chapter 5, I discuss these aspects of late liberalism in the north and in education specifically.

Following educational actors' concerns in the current thesis, I want to highlight the forms of spatio-temporality at work in this account. Povinelli uses the phrase "chronotope of late liberalism" to draw attention to late liberalism's spatio-temporal contours (Povinelli, 2011:25-29). The "chronotope" is theorized by Mikhail Bakhtin who describes it as the "interconnectedness of time and space" (Bakhtin, 1982:84). Bakhtin is talking about novels, but I am talking more generally. The chronotope is the particular way in which forms of spatiality and temporality are understood, enacted and connected at any given moment (Bakhtin, 1982:85). This spatio-temporal configuration creates meaning and possibility. This includes, Bakhtin explains, what forms of actor, action and agency are at work, or could be. The chronotope of late liberalism is therefore the spatio-temporalities that are at work in late liberalism, around which it operates and which enable its constituent actors and action.

Povinelli is concerned particularly with the temporalities of the "endurance and the enduring," [2012:31] in the chronotope of late liberalism. Here I build on Povinelli's account by engaging the linear-progressive temporalities I have described thus far. I show how these work across liberalisms and combine with and organize stagnant, universal notion of space. This is again exemplified by John Locke. Locke's (1980) ideas about temporal progress and forwards-moving civilization justify imperial spatial expansion and practices of land occupation and cultivation by settlers in north America. Linear chronological clock time is, more generally, an organizing logic of western modernity (Harvey, 1989; Adam, 1998; Levine, 2006). Space, on the other hand, has been reduced to an object or commodity (Harvey, 2003). These versions of both time and space are universalized (understood to be the same everywhere and always).

In this thesis I argue that the chronotope of late liberalism is also the chronotope of settler colonialism. The same spatio-temporal logics drive and underpin the settler colonial state as those that underpin colonization. It is this chronotope that is the target of the actors in place-based education projects that I describe in Chapter 6. This fleshing-out of the spatio-temporal relationship of settler-colonialism and late liberalism is one of the contributions of the current thesis. So are

its implications: the chronotope of settler-colonialism and late liberalism suggests that a post-liberal agency might involve paying attention to and reworking its spatio-temporalities. I go further into this account of the chronotope of late liberalism in Chapter 6, drawing on participants' own accounts of these spatio-temporalities. I also argue that participants point to one way in which this reworking might be done.

The presence of these multiple interrelated forms of liberalism is particularly visible in the Canadian North. The Northern cities feel very much like I imagine an early frontier town would: with plenty of do-gooders, gold-seekers and adventurers and a sharp division of prospecting white incomers, government officials and poorer Indigenous people. This looks like early, classical liberal colonialism: civilizers, progress-usherers and explorers. They are also mired in neoliberal imperatives and realities: the commodification and exploitation of land, particularly through mining, and the creation of Indigenous subjects as financial beneficiaries and workers around these emerging projects and logics. Finally, as Indigenous peoples in Canada, Inuit, Dene and Metis in the North are also participants in the containment of difference as culture. All of these things are happening now, simultaneously – all are iterations of, but not reducible to, the forms of liberalism I described above.

Before I conclude this account of late liberalism and late liberal agency, I want to reiterate that I take politics and agency to be locally and contingently constituted. This means that I do not seek to posit a universal or fixed account of what agency is, liberal or otherwise. Juridical and autological forms of agency are persistent, but not inherent. They are resonant and related across contexts, but not unified (Latour describes how this happens in practice [2007]). Liberal agency, then, manifests both as stories and in practices. These include but are not limited to political theory, governments, activism, state institutions, social norms and all the moments and events that constitute life within late liberalism. Liberalism is, in this thesis, therefore not a political ideology or theory (although it certainly includes theories) but a related multitude of ways of delineating and regulating politics itself. Povinelli calls this “a symphony of liberalisms” (Povinelli, 2011). When I say liberal agency in this thesis, then, I invoke its chronotope, its histories and its juridical and autological forms, but I also recognize its countless variations and variability.

## 2.2 Critiques

This section is about how Michel Foucault and Judith Butler, as well as others who follow them, have challenged the liberal account of agency as autological and argued instead that it is heterogeneously and contingently constituted. They have shown both that the liberal narrative of political action is false and that it is a very real way of organizing people, lives and thought. On this latter point critical and queer scholars have shown how politics defined by and around the liberal and neoliberal state necessarily oppress or exclude certain groups of people and forms of life, from queer people (Wingard, 2013), to Indigenous people (Shaw, 2008), to disabled people (Soldatic and Chapman, 2010; Grover and Soldatic, 2012). This means that resistance and self-determination for these groups expressed in liberal terms (“the emancipatory model of agency” [Saba Mahmood discussing Judith Butler and Seyla Benhabib [Mahmood, 2012:20]) holds not only false promises, but also the risk of repeating the violence they seek to transform. While these critical and queer critiques of the accuracy and ethics of liberal narratives of agency are important (and in part motivate the current thesis), this section focuses on how these scholars problematize agency and begin to articulate accounts of subjectivity and action that challenge the liberal logics described above. This problematization enables the specific empirical accounts of post-liberal and latent liberal agency that I go onto describe in the following section, and contribute to with this thesis. I begin with Foucault because critical and queer scholarship is so indebted to his work. With the exception of Foucault, however, for the rest of this chapter I limit my review to authors who are currently participating in an ongoing conversation about liberal agency. After I introduce Foucault’s work on agency, I discuss Butler’s development of it. Finally, I use Saba Mahmood (2012) and Karen Barad’s (2007) engagements with Butler to make Butler’s (and Foucault’s) approaches more resonant with the settler-colonial and Indigenous contexts of the current thesis.

Foucault’s critique of liberal agency is two-fold. First, he shows how the autological subject of liberal agency is far from universal, but has emerged historically. Inspired by Foucault, I described some of this historical emergence in

the previous section. In what Foucault (1982) describes as his “history of the subject,” he looks similarly to historical moments and processes to show how particular forms of subjectivity come to be understood and articulated locally. He also shows how these forms of subjectivity are tied to the modes of government at work at the time. For example, in *The History of Sexuality, Volume 1*, Foucault discusses the Christian confessionality that he sees as having become a central feature of modern life. Confession began with Christianity but its logics now operate in all areas of life (Foucault, 1978). We have become obsessed, he argues, with “the infinite task of extracting from the depths of oneself” (*ibid*:59) and “the obligation to confess is now relayed through so many different points...that we no longer perceive it as the effect of a power that constrains us” (*ibid*:60). The concept and act of confession, he explains, produces the subjects that supposedly confesses: “The confession is a ritual of discourse in which the speaking subject is also the subject of the statement” (*ibid*:61). The subject that confession assumes, and in fact produces, is single self who can be freed or rid of ones guilt and sins through self-reflection, self-knowledge and ultimately confession. Here, Foucault illustrates the relation of knowledge to subject (subjects are known and knowable) and therefore knowledge to power more generally. I draw on this relation in Chapter 3 when discussing Indigeneity, the state and the politics of recognition. He also suggests that confession, and with it the autonomous subject, have become naturalized.

To take another example (and to show how Foucault’s analysis works across contexts), in *What is an Author?* Foucault (Foucault & Rabinow, 1984:101-120) gives a similar account of “the author function”. The author function is, he argues, the production of the unified individual author-subject as an effect of the attribution of a body of writing to a single person. While this subject is related to the subject of confession, it is also historically specific in that it serves a disciplinary purpose: allowing writers to be regulated, identified and punished for the transgression of law. In this way, the author is produced by this rationality of governance, but is also a nexus of law, policing and knowledge. In his accounts of confessionality and the author function, then Foucault shows that the subject does not precede forms of government and power in the form of human capacity, but is produced through and with those forms. As Saba Mahmood summarizes, “the set of capacities inhering in



a subject – that is, the abilities that define her modes of agency – are not the residue of an undominated self that existed prior to the operations of power but are themselves the products of those operations” (Mahmood, 2012:17). This subject looks like the autological actor of liberalism, but is produced very differently. For the current thesis, its entanglement with modes of government is particularly relevant. In the next chapter I describe how Indigenous subjectivity has emerged similarly with the late liberal settler-colonial state.

Foucault is notoriously pessimistic about the possibility of escaping these modes of government, but he is nonetheless concerned with resistance and, in my reading, agency. Resistance, he argues, is always present. In fact, it is co-produced with the processes of subjectivation described above: “Where there is power, there is resistance, and yet, or rather consequently, this resistance is never in a position of exteriority in relation to power” (Foucault, 1978:95). Importantly, this is not a theory of resistance or agency as such. Rather, it is a call to look for their specific operations at any given moment – and always in relation to the operations of government and power.

In my reading, Foucault does precisely this. He looks for forms of agency that relate to dominant narrative and modes of action at a given moment, and that rework them, but do not escape them. For Foucault, “ethics” understood as “technologies of the self” are one such practice (Foucault, Rabinow & Faubion, 2000: 225). Techniques of the self are practices, techniques and knowledge that permit “individuals to effect by their own means or with the help of others, a certain number of operations on their own bodies and souls, thoughts, conduct, and way of being” (*ibid*). Of course, this could look like the confessionalism described above. However, in Foucault’s account, these can also be technologies for self-transformation. Foucault reminds us, however, that this form of agency is “never in a position of exteriority in relation to power” (Foucault, 1978:95). The subject *is* a mode of government, after all, but can act on that mode by acting on herself, and can act on herself by acting on the mode.

To take another example (and one I return to late in the thesis), in *What is Critique*, Foucault describes Reformation Protestant’s “critique” as another moment

of agency or, as he says, of “not being governed thus” (Foucault, 1997:28-30). To resist the dominant arts of government of the church, Foucault’s Reformation Protestants do not reject the god, biblical texts or truth status through which those arts govern. Instead, they re-configure their relations within and against the government of the church to shift authority from the priest to the text and its reader. Foucault’s Protestants therefore emerge through, work with and strategically mobilise the dominant terms and arts of government – in ways which make them intelligible and desirable in those terms whilst also questioning and destabilising them and their dominance. This creates a critical space from which some alternate version of politics and authority are then articulated – and with them alternate agents. The agency of critique for Foucault is therefore a reconfiguration of existing forms of government and knowledge, from within those forms, to change the forms themselves. It is a form of refusal, of “not being governed thus, by that, in that name, for those ends,” which nonetheless draws some strength and intelligibility from that form – from “thus”, “that”, “that name” and “those ends” (Foucault, 1997:28-30). This is more, however, than a simple rejection. It creates ‘new’ forms of government and subjectivity, in the form of Protestantism. This is another scenario in which action and agency do not align with the dominant terms of action, actor and agency (this time those of the church).

Critique is a particularly useful way of thinking about action in the context of education and research because it makes the nexus of knowledge and modes of government central and explicit. It captures, for me, the type of governmental refusal for which anti-colonial activists are reaching. I will therefore return to it in Chapter 6. I want to emphasize here, however, that Foucault is talking about knowledge in practice not simply in scholarship (even Butler’s [2001] version of critique is concerned primarily with critical scholarship). He is also enacting a particular relationship of scholarship to practice which has informed thinking about ethics in the context of my research. That is, he takes the actions of protestants and creates a narrative which further disrupts the meaning of action. Critique is happening in the practices of protestants and in Foucault’s story as well as in the relations of the two. I also want to emphasize the uncertainty and indeterminacy of Foucault’s critique: “Critique... is an instrument, a means for a future or a truth that it will not know nor

happen to be, it oversees a domain it would want to police and is unable to regulate” (Foucault, 1997: 25). This uncertainty sits especially uncomfortably with liberal emphases on strategies, goals and deliberation – with the knowable, or the desire to know within action. This refusal to be certain or a necessary uncertainty, along with ambiguity and ambivalence, are all recurring themes of the activities I encountered in my fieldwork. Later in the thesis I argue that they might be one quality of post-liberal agency, too.

Foucault’s account of the ways agency and actors are co-produced with modes of government informs Judith Butler’s account of the gendered subject in *Gender Trouble* (Butler, 1990). Butler is particularly concerned with the ongoing practices of subjectivation in daily life. Gendered subjectivation occurs, she argues, through discursive “iteration” of gendered norms. There is no “original” norm or gender, only ongoing references to one. Similarly, there is no pure individual subject to ‘free’. The subject can only exist or act in and in relation to heteronormative and performatively constituted emerging gender norms. Yet it is precisely in this reference and iteration, she argues, that resistance and even change are possible. That is, not by destroying gender, or freeing some pre-gender subject, but by gender failing to reconstitute itself or being reconstituted in a way that undermines its legitimacy or exposes its contingency. That is, norms are stable through repetition but each iteration is also open to disruption. Butler points to two opportunities for resistance and transformation within these logics: subversion (practicing gender norms in a way that exposes its contingent production), and resignification (gradually changing the meaning of a given word or object). She posits drag as one such real-world practice that only makes sense with reference to the gender binary but which nonetheless undermines its stability, working both through and against it. In this sense, Butler describes her account of “the iterability of performativity” as “a theory of agency” (Butler, 1990: xxiv).

Butler later goes on to emphasize what, reading Foucault, she calls the “the paradox of subjectivation,” (Butler, 1993:15). That is, the norms that a person would resist, are also the same norms that enable or produce their personhood. The very processes on or against which a subject might seek to act are the processes that

enable that action. This problem recurs throughout scholarship and activism concerned with resisting and transforming existing power relations: action only becomes possible, effective or intelligible through drawing on and therefore repeating those power relations themselves. Stories of resistance or change are frequently stories of this problem and its engagement and negotiation. As I outline in the previous chapter, the current thesis is particularly concerned with versions of this seemingly paradoxical problem. It is concerned with how it manifests in the Canadian north, as the late liberal settler state, and how educational actors there are resolving and rearticulating it in practice.

Foucault and Butler have inspired a huge body of literature on queer forms of resistance as well as inspiring queer politics in action. This includes the scholarship reviewed below, and indeed this thesis. They have also, however, been highly contentious amongst scholars and activists of resistance. Here, I turn to some accusations made against Foucault and Butler by scholars who share their political goals of resistance and transformation. I do this not to undermine their accounts, but ultimately to strengthen it and develop them for use in the current thesis. I discuss the accusations of Butler and/or Foucault repeating binary thinking, being overly linguistic, androcentrism, extending liberal logics, and being overly deterministic or structuralist. I do not find these accusations convincing (why I do not is not important here) but they do expose some of the stakes and fault lines in discussions of agency more generally, which are relevant to the current discussion. I draw, therefore, on two scholars who draw extensively on Foucault and Butler themselves, Saba Mahmood (2012) and Karen Barad (2007). Their critiques are therefore particularly nuanced and advanced versions of critiques that get made from all angles, post-structuralist and otherwise. My aim is not to evaluate anything but to flesh out a language for talking about agency from this perspective in the rest of the thesis.

Saba Mahmood (2012) argues that by focusing so fully on the ways that norms might be resisted, subverted or resignified, Butler homogenizes normalization itself and therefore repeats a binary either/or way of thinking about power. Agency can be located not only in resistance, Mahmood suggests, but in the different ways in

which norms themselves are embodied, inhabited and practiced. She shows this through an account of the agency of women in the Egyptian Islamic revival as they inhabit and embody norms in various ways: “Norms are not only consolidated and/or subverted, I would suggest, but performed, inhabited, and experienced in a variety of ways.” (Mahmood, 2012: 22). Far from being passively determined, the women actively and creatively follow and enact norms in varied ways. Patriarchal Islam is no more homogenous or determined than the feminists that critique it. Butler’s focus on resistance and subversion would, Mahmood argues, have obscured the potential for agency within norms themselves. It also risks repeating binary thinking by locating agency always in opposition. Mahmood explains that to assume that agency only happens when it leads to some political end or goal would reinscribe the strategic, autological, rational-acting version of agency described above. This is of great significance to the current thesis because, as I show in Chapter 5, even when participants engage liberal logics they often do so reflexively and creatively. It is also helps identify and avoid equating all agency with liberal agency, or articulating participants as victims of liberal narratives.

Butler’s emphasis on the linguistic and words as constitutive of bodies and identities has been accused of obscuring the roles of materiality and the non-human in her account of performative discourse. Karen Barad (2007:145-146) argues that Butler and Foucault both focus too exclusively on the human, to the exclusion of non-human animals, cyborgs, machines, quantum physics, and other material realities. Scholars in Science and Technology Studies, and New Materialists have shown that much more than words and humans matter when it comes to understanding political life (Haraway, 1991; see also Coole and Frost, 2010). Indigenous communities, in fact, frequently assign agency to the land, weather, plants, animals and so-on, as well as their critiques of liberal ontology (I describe all this at length in Chapter 6). They also assign significance to these things as forms of government. As such, in this thesis, I have left open what might count as an agent, as well as what might counts as the ontological components of agency and government more generally (I discuss this further with regards to methodology in Chapter 3). For this reason, I would say this project is closer to Foucault’s eclectic ontology than Butler’s discursive one.

Finally, Butler has been accused of repackaging a liberal version of agency-as-choice in *Gender Trouble* – of creating what Butler herself calls a “wardrobe” of gender (Butler, 1993:21), from which actors can simply choose their gender and other aspects of their realities and subjectivities. This wardrobe version of “doing gender” and performativity in general is liberal and autological in the sense that agency is understood as a capacity for choice that can be exercised, even though the reality of gender and indeed subjectivity might be constructed discursively. Butler explicitly rejects this criticism in *Undoing Gender* (1993). It is not, she says, that “there is a ‘one’ who is prior to gender, a one who goes to the wardrobe of gender decides with deliberation which gender it will be today” (Butler, 1993:21). In this statement, Butler rejects autological agency. Her critics flag, however, the risk of liberal logics creeping back into accounts which claim or aim to reject them. This risk is a central theme of the current thesis and very present, I argue, in the politics of decolonization.

Mahmood (2012) identifies another potential instance or risk of autological agency in Butler’s concept of subversion. Subversion can be read, Mahmood argues, as a strategic redeployment of hetero-patriarchal tools to queer feminist ends. Strategy in this goal-oriented sense aligns with liberalism and obscures possibilities for agency which do not work to achieve feminist goals. By removing the aim or achievement of goals and ends from our analysis of action, Mahmood argues, we can see many more forms of agency than subversion or resignification (such as that of the women in the Egyptian mosque movement described above). I return to this potentially strategic and autological logic of subversion throughout the thesis. This connection of liberal action with efforts at acting otherwise, via strategy, is one of the slippery connections between modes of agency that I describe in Chapter 5 (and then further complicate through the roles of ambiguity in Chapter 6).

In this section, through Butler and Foucault, I have set out a way of following agency in practice and *in situ*, and as neither determined by nor separable from the broader forms of government of which agency is part. In this way, Butler and Foucault both account for and depart from the liberal narratives of agency I described in the previous section. For them, agency is located, as Foucault describes of critique,

in the relationship between “that which repeats and that which transforms”, instead of determinism or a structure/agency opposition, we see “dynamic interplay” (Foucault, 1997). This relationship is the object of the current thesis. I have also, using Mahmood and Barad’s critiques, shown that this relationship can involve human and non-human, textual and non-textual components. Finally, I have argued for being attentive to the agential possibilities of liberalisms, as well as latent and creeping liberal logics and binaries in forms of action which seek to resist them.

## **2.3 Alternatives**

I now turn to empirical studies of both non-liberal and agency inspired by the critiques outlined above. I devote most space to efforts to identify instances of agency that do not align with liberal logics, because that is the aim of this thesis. First, I turn to Saba Mahmood’s (2012) fieldwork with women in the Egyptian mosque movement. Then, I describe recent theories and accounts of “radical negativity” in affect studies (“radical negativity” was the title of a 2014 conference in this field). Finally, I consider Elizabeth Povinelli’s (2012) fieldwork with Australian Indigenous movements. Each account shows one way of articulating and engaging the paradox of subjectivation and tells us something different about the possibilities for both liberal and non-liberal agency (and their relations) in different locations. None of these accounts would be possible within theory alone as each draws on practice, on actors, and on actors’ accounts of themselves. I have chosen these three because, although there is a lot of literature concerned with resistance and action of various kinds, these three use the words ‘agency’ and ‘liberal’ to describe what they are doing. I have chosen them also because each has an implication for the current thesis. Mahmood (2012) demonstrates the necessity and potential in disaggregating agency from resistance and politics, as well as the possibilities for agential embodiment of liberal logics. Halberstam (2011) and Povinelli (2012) show the difficulties in identifying alternate forms of agency from within liberal academia, particularly when non-liberal forms of agency are unlikely to share liberalism’s insistence on markers of permanence, success and measurability.

As I noted in the previous chapter and earlier sections, the key insight Mahmood (2012) draws from Foucault and Butler is that agency must be researched empirically. Mahmood argues that if, "...the ability to effect change in the world and in oneself is historically and culturally specific (both in terms of what constituted 'change' and the means by which it is effected), then the meaning of sense of agency cannot be fixed in advance, but must emerge through an analysis of the particular concepts that enable specific modes of being, responsibility and effectivity," (Mahmood, 2012:14). She is concerned specifically with Muslim women, who are the subject of much feminist debate and are assumed by liberal feminists (she says) to be largely lacking agency. Mahmood therefore looks to Muslim women in the Egyptian mosque movement to see how they understand, articulate and practice agency, in context and in relation to the power/knowledge nexus of which these women are part. That is, she seeks to understand it primarily in relation to patriarchal Islam, the Islamic revival and Western imperialism – not some universal feminist goal. Looked at in this way, some instances which would be interpreted as passivity or subordination through the "emancipatory model of agency" (Butler, 1990:136) are in fact moments of agency from a local, situated point of view.

In doing this, Mahmood also demonstrates the necessity of a disaggregation of agency, resistance and politics. She argues that by equating agency with the 'ends' of particular political goals (such as legal equality) liberal feminism has effectively erased both Muslim women's own understandings of what they are doing, and any possibility for action that is non-strategic and therefore non-liberal. It is possible, she shows, for women to be agentic in ways that do not align with a liberal feminist emancipatory project. By focusing on agency rather than resistance in this way, Mahmood offers one way of avoiding totalizing the subordination/resistance binary. In all this, she speaks to the very same concerns (women's agency) of the feminists she critiques. Mahmood analysis is central to the rationale and approach of the current thesis.

In a different vein, scholars in affect studies have theorized radical negativity and "public feelings" (this is the title of an ongoing research network) as potential



forms of agency within liberalism. In *the Queer Art of Failure*, J. Jack Halberstam describes failure, forgetting and mediocrity as forms of agency – that is, actions which are devalued and erased within the discourse of “success” so central to neoliberalism (Halberstam, 2011). In fact, he argues that inaction may be the only form of agency within a discourse where action itself is so highly prized and articulated. Reading Fanon, Halberstam argues that suggests that in this way, the “the subject refuses the knowledge offers and refuses to be a knowing subject in the form mandated by Enlightenment philosophies of self and other” (Halberstam, 2011:14). Here Halbertsam points to the possibilities of non-liberal agency in perhaps the unlikeliest place of all – in not acting at all. Relatedly, in *Feminist Killjoys* Sarah Ahmed (2010) has theorized grumpiness, unhappiness and rage as offering possibilities for agency. These “killjoy” affects contrast with liberalism’s insistence on happiness as a moral imperative (an imperative which condemns, she notes, women as “killjoys” for speaking out against their own oppression). Similarly, in *No Future* Lee Edelman (2004) makes a similar case for rejecting the future and even hope, as these too are closely bound up in the linear and progressive temporal logics of liberalism. This last point is particularly pertinent to the current thesis, in which participants are concerned with the kinds of temporalities underlying certain forms of politics.

Finally, drawing on Heidegger and on Foucault’s heterotopias, Elizabeth Povinelli describes “potentiality,” as “a certain moment, or condition, in the life of alternative social projects – those moments, or those conditions in which a social project is neither something nor nothing,” (Povinelli, 2011:8). Povinelli is interested especially in the relation of “something” and “nothing,” in “this indeterminate oscillation – the virtual space that opens up in between the potentiality and actuality of an alternative social project” (Povinelli, 2011: 8). She argues that “the possibilities of new forms of life dwell and are sheltered within the variation between the force of existing and the power of acting in these intensified zones of being and not being” (Povinelli, 2011:10). What distinguishes the agency of potentiality from the chronotope of late liberalism is, Povinelli argues, that liberal agency is necessarily something fully realized, enduring and persistent. Potentiality on the other hand might eventually fail, vanish, or be assimilated. Only in liberal logics does this

ending reduce its potency or significance. Povinelli's "potentiality," has been especially helpful to me in moments when I have been unsure whether something 'counts' as existing, being, or convincing within the (liberal) terms of academia that I share with the research participants. Like these participants, and like Povinelli's social projects, I am reaching, grasping and imagining for non-liberal agency, more often than I am theorizing it with certainty. Perhaps the conditions for theory or certainty are too strongly liberal to do so. Perhaps, as Povinelli suggests, the non-liberal or post-liberal might necessarily fall short of or refuse these things, including being almost unrecognizable or convincing in academic contexts, or almost non-existent in the world.

I now return briefly to thinking about liberal forms of agency. By looking at the affective and "lived experience of neoliberalism" (Cvetovich, 2012), scholars like Margot Weiss (2011), Anne Cvetovich (2012), and Sarah Ahmed (2010) show the ways in which liberal agency is materialized heterogeneously and locally. In Weiss's case this materialization happens through BDSM practices, for Cvetovich it happens through medicalized depression and for Ahmed it happens through the imperative to be happy. These scholars also show how the everyday of liberal agency resonates and relates across multiple locations. Liberal forms of agency appear in the current thesis in a similarly varied and everyday but still persistent way.

When combined with the texts reviewed above, these accounts of agency make visible the impossibility of talking about either liberal or alternate forms of agency without also talking about the other. Ahmed (2010), for example, began with happiness, but developed an account of the killjoy as a potentially non-liberal agent in the process (as described above). Weiss (2011) finds possibilities for agency at the very edge of the neoliberal (in her account) BDSM scene, in race play. Cvetovich (2012) finds possibilities for agency in politicized accounts of depression as the condition of life within neoliberalism, and also in non-medicalized responses such as knitting or tooth flossing. Similarly, all the texts above which begin with accounts of non-liberal forms of agency, also end up articulating the specific, local forms of liberalism to which their alternatives relate.

In *The Promise of Happiness*, Ahmed (2010) examines what she argues is one of the most universalized drives and desires: happiness. She identifies the forms of subjectivity that are foreclosed by this drive, and how narratives of happiness – including the happy family, happy worker and happy citizen – work to create and uphold forms of governmentality and power relations. Ahmed follows experiences, practices and articulations of happiness and unhappiness across differently classed, racialized and gender texts and settings, to show how the promises of happiness are aligned with the promises of liberalism. She is particularly concerned with moments of what she calls “affect alienation”: the experience of the “gap between the promise of happiness and how [we] are affected by objects that promise happiness,” (2010: 42) or “feeling at odds with the world or feeling that the world is odd,” (2010: 168). The promise of happiness works to hide or perpetuate neoliberalism’s violence, she argues. Often the imperative to be happy masks unhappiness and injustice. For example, when the feminist at the dining room table fails to find a sexist joke funny and/or refuses to laugh at it, she feels alienated internally and becomes a “kill joy” externally. Happiness, laughter and joking in this instance are used to reinscribe a form of unhappiness (sexism) and then police or discipline its exposure. For Ahmed, as I described above, this also means non-liberal agency might be located in the refusal to smile, laugh, nod, to be happy or to value happiness uncritically. All these practices offer ways for a subject to exist or act that sit uneasily with liberalism’s imperative that we try to be or can be happy. Here we see the interrelation of liberal and non-liberal logics of action.

Similarly, in her ethnography of the San Francisco BDSM scene, Margot Weiss (2011) traces what she calls “the circuits” of power between the culture and practices of BDSM practitioners, and the politics and economics of neo-liberalism and imperialism. She shows how the language of individual and civil liberties and privacy with which BDSM practitioners politicize (or depoliticize) their sexual practices and community aligns with that of neo-liberalism and racism, despite public and academic perceptions of BDSM as a marginal or transgressive sexuality. According to Weiss, the BDSM actor is white, male, affluent: an autonomous subject, able to make choices and actions that are understood to be removed from the power structures and relations in which they are in fact embedded. Claiming that

practices such as the slave auction or male dominance can be removed from social and political context as “just play”, for example, in fact enable the structures of dominance in those contexts to continue to operate without reflection or challenge (Weiss, 2011:17, 151). Conversely, Weiss shows how understandings in “the scene” of domination and submission between black and white practitioners as *always* race play, remove that same liberal subjectivity from black people. Weiss traces some of the ways in which BDSM practitioners are constituted as actors, not prior to BDSM practices and norms, but through them. These subjects are tied into the logics of neoliberalism through the constitution of an experienced and skilled expert practitioner through the buying and mastering of sex toys, the hosting and attendance of paid parties, and the attendance or delivery of classes on BDSM techniques – as well as through the regulation of who can or does practice BDSM. Sexuality here can be bought, acquired, learnt and exercised. Weiss underscores the neoliberal nature of this version of sexuality by showing how the same activities of power exchange, sadism and masochism became rearticulated from the Leather scene into the BDSM scene as the socioeconomics of San Francisco changed. This is an illustration of what Foucault and Butler (see previous section) describe as the co-production of forms of subject and government, once again in a local and everyday manifestation.

In this way, Weiss’s text carefully relates economic processes and personal practices using “circuits” to avoid the hierarchy implied by structure and agency, or local and global. She shows how one moment of action (say, in a play dungeon) relates to another (say, in city planning) circuitously. Weiss is interested in the everyday but not in forgoing broader contexts and processes. Weiss also shows how liberal logics can creep back into action in unlikely places, even when that action claims to be counter-hegemonic. It is counter-intuitive, she argues, that she should find BDSM to be so conventional, so commodified, individualized and marketized. This last point is especially relevant to the current thesis. She identifies some of the persistently liberal logics of so-called counter-cultural action. These are the ways autological accounts of agency have assimilated and commodified resistance. This last point is, of course, a feature of late liberalism (although Weiss is discussing neoliberalism) and the object of much of Chapter 5 in which I discuss the possibility of ‘choosing’ non-liberal agency.

Finally, Ann Cvetovich (2012) uses an autoethnographic account of her own depression to show how the experience of depression is also the experience of life in neoliberal, capitalist society. That is, depression is a cultural, social, economic and therefore “public feeling”, or “cultural mood”, rather than an individual, medical or internal fault (Cvetovich, 2012:1-5). The neoliberal narrative of depression suggests that depression is about individual psychology. Sometimes, as an illness, it is not the individual’s fault. At other times, when the individual fails to do something about it, the individual becomes personally responsible. The liberal narrative of depression suggests that the liberal subject can choose to act to cure herself of this illness as an individual. Instead, Anne Cvetovich shows how the mundane, everyday reality of depression is actually just the mundane, everyday reality of life in the neoliberal university context she works in and the capitalist society she lives in. She traces the concurrence of neoliberal life and depression through various moments of her own life. She shows, for example, how her experiences of the supermarket and the academic job market are simultaneously experiences of depression and of neoliberalism (Cvetovich, 2012:45-46).

*Depression as a Public Feeling* is more than a critique of the medical model of depression. It is also an attempt to rework the agency available to the depressed person and to Cvetovich herself. For Cvetovich, liberal agency is once again a violent illusion. Depression is not, in this account, an individual problem with an individual solution. The very thing (individualization) that is being touted as a solution is in fact the ‘cause’. *Depression as a Public Feeling* captures this dual nature and critique of liberalisms that is common to critical and queer scholarship as it works in micropractices and in the everyday. Cvetovich also attempts to locate other forms of understanding and hope in “slow living” (mindfulness), empathy, art, knitting and weaving, as well as in the critique of depression as a public feeling itself (Cvetovich, 2012:155-202). She is careful, however, to point out that these are sometimes the same techniques offered to depressed people and used to individualize their suffering by neoliberalism.

My aim in reviewing these texts about forms of liberalism is to show that the logics of liberalisms change, adapt and persist. That is, they are just as contingent as

anything else. I also want to show that in changing, adapting and persisting, they can appear in unlikely forms, including radicalism, and including what at first glance looks like anti-liberalism. I also want to show that it is nearly impossible to talk about one part of the problem without talking about the other. Even when Weiss or Cvetovich set out to show how the objects of their study are liberal they cannot help but point to liberalism's limits and how it might be possible to act some other way. Vice versa, the same is true for those scholars I take to be concerned with non-liberal forms of agency. When Halberstam sets out to celebrate failure, for example, he generates a pretty clear account of the functions of success and measurement in neoliberalism in that celebration. These three points inform and are elaborated in the current project. This last point, on the inseparability of agency from liberalism, is particularly salient in my efforts at imagining post-liberalism.

## Conclusion

This chapter provides the theoretical context for the current thesis. The first section on agency in late liberalism outlined liberal agency as autological, juridical, economic and linear-progressive. These heterogeneous liberal logics are part of the object of this thesis, and are engaged by participants in the Akitsiraq Law School in particular (as I describe in Chapter 5). In the latter two sections, I used critical and queer literature to problematize these liberal narratives as illusory, violent, contingent and varied. This critical and queer literature begins with Foucault and Butler, and builds in their critiques of liberal forms of government and subjectivity to produce empirical accounts of the local workings of agency, both liberal and otherwise. All of the critical and queer texts I review above offer slightly different formulations of this problem of agency and give different empirical accounts of its 'resolution' by identifying potentially 'non' or 'post' liberal action. This variety reflects, primarily, scholars' different empirical grounds.

It is the commonalities of these critical and queer accounts which form the basis for the current thesis. First, all these accounts engage some version of what appears in Butler's *Bodies that Matter* as the "paradox of subjectivation" and in this thesis as a debate around the possibilities of the settler-colonial state for

decolonization (Butler, 1993:15). That is, all of the scholarship documents actors attempting to act simultaneously against, to transform and within something which sets the terms for action itself: “the paradox of subjectivation (*assujettissement*) is precisely that the subject who would resist such norms is itself enabled, if not produced, by such norms,” (Butler, 1993:15). This is, in fact, a key framework in my discussion of decolonization in Canada in Chapter 4.

Second, as I have reiterated, this body of scholarship demonstrates the need and possibilities for discussing agency empirically, locally and in relation to the specific power/knowledge nexuses or modalities of government in which they are embedded. Ethnography is used by most of these scholars and shown by these texts to be particularly suited for the task at hand, for reasons I explore in the next chapter when I discuss my methodology. Despite or even through this empirical approach, all of the scholarship maintains the tension between theorizing or articulating agency and practicing or identifying it. This does not necessarily map onto a distinction between book theory and street theory – the scholarship has a tendency to blur or level the two. This includes recognizing the embeddedness of the scholar in the situations they seek to understand.

Third and finally, all of the scholarship attempts to move away from binary thinking by giving creative and productive accounts of agency as more than resistance. That does not necessarily mean that they escape the binary, and its persistence is a recurring theme throughout this thesis. Although most of the texts I describe focus on either liberal or non-liberal forms of agency, and define their object accordingly, none manages to talk about one without the other. They all show, therefore, the interrelation of liberal and alternate forms of agency.

The literature reviewed in this thesis has therefore begun to create a language for thinking and talking about agency. My aim is not, however, to transplant this language to northern Canada (for example, by calling education “resignification,” or “subversion,” whether or not it is these things). My aim instead is to contribute to this language, by contributing an account of northern educators’ action. With this account, I propose that post-liberal agency, multiple relational forms of agency, decolonization and higher education are all necessary and productive areas for

expanding critical and queer understandings of politics and action. I now turn to draw on the concerns and approaches of the literature reviewed in this chapter to lay out a methodology for the current project in Chapter 3.



### 3. Space, time and research methodology

*I want to subvert method by helping to remake methods: that are not moralistic; that imagine and participate in politics and other forms of the good in novel and creative ways; and that start to do this by escaping the postulate of singularity... To do this we will need to unmake many of our methodological habits including: the desire for certainty; the expectation that we can usually arrive at more or less stable conclusions... the belief that as social scientists we have special insights that allow us to see further than others into certain parts of social reality....*

But, first of all we need to unmake our desire and expectation for security.

(Law, 2004:9 [emphasis added]).

In September 2009 I participated in an induction week for new doctoral students at my university. As a new PhD student I sat through multiple presentations on the doctoral and research process. The staff and senior PhD presenters repeatedly turned our attention to timelines. They told us that we should use the first year to develop our research methodologies and skills, the second to do data collection, and the third for data analysis and writing up (although if we were really good, they said, we should be writing the whole time). This would get us to the end of a PhD in three and a half years (we now know this is a rarity). One induction week presenter welcomed us and told us: “A PhD is essentially muddling through as best you can for three years... and then imposing a coherent narrative at the end.” This comment stayed with me and has been of exceptional utility during my time as a doctoral student.

The comment resonates strongly with John Law’s (2004) *After Method: Mess in Social Science Research* in which Law argues that research methodology is at core a way of managing mess. The social world is messy, Law says. Social science research methodologies are ways of making mess make sense by producing tidy

accounts of social life. Because knowledge is implicated in the performative construction of reality, he argues, social science research therefore attempts to make reality neater: “methods, their rules, and even more methods’ practices, not only describe but also help to *produce* the reality that they understand.” (Law, 2004:5). The underside of this function of research methodology is that some aspect of messy realities must be eliminated and excluded in the process of social science research and, in this logic, also from the world. The comment above shows one way in which we do this: our research processes are often a good deal messier than the linear and coherent narratives we must tell in order to demonstrate our competence and authority in academia.

This chapter starts where John Law leaves off. I take it as given that reality is messy and that research is a performative process of ordering. Throughout the chapter, I give an account of what I did in the research process and why and, in doing so, show that *how* this ordering matters in the context of researching with and in Indigenous communities. In the first section, I return to the contingent, embedded and empirical way of thinking about agency I described in the previous chapter. This approach to agency, I argue, is best materialized methodologically in the form of “praxiography” (Mol, 2002:31-33). Praxiography is a hybrid of praxis, practice and ethnographic approaches to research. Like ethnography, it is a framework for multiple methods practices. I describe how praxiography enabled me to co-articulate the research problem with participants and to recognize my own embeddedness in the research problem. I also explain how praxiography allowed me, crucially, to engage the spatio-temporal and ontological concerns of the participants. My embeddedness in the problem and participants’ ontological and spatio-temporal concerns are two key elements of the critique of the spatio-temporalities of the research process that I develop in this thesis.

In the second section, I describe how I came to the case studies I worked with. The thesis is only loosely organized around the case studies (the smaller projects of Dechinta and Akitsirag within the wider movement for a Northern university, with the wider still decolonization debate). I describe how, in the research, I used participant observation, interviews, documentary analysis and

autoethnographic methods. My primary aim in this section is more practical and pedestrian: to help the reader imagine the places and activities I discuss in the thesis as well as to situate myself and my own agency in the picture.

In the third section, I explain how I have come to tell the story you are reading now. I return to the linear and progressive PhD narratives presented to us in induction week. I contrast these with my more cyclical research experience in which I moved repeatedly between field and desk, object and method, and theory and practice throughout. Ultimately, participants showed me that the divisions between these orientations were false in the context of the current thesis. They also showed me that maintaining the pretense of these divisions aligns with colonizing spatio-temporalities. In all these ways, while this chapter serves the functions of transparency and justification of a conventional methodology chapter, it also constitutes autoethnographic data and analysis. The chapter therefore begins to theorize agency through and in higher education research.

### **3.1 Praxiography**

*...attending to the multiplicity of reality is also an act.*

(Mol, 2002:6)

If agency is a local, embedded and contingently constituted phenomenon as I argued in the last chapter, then researching agency requires a methodology that engages with local contexts and meanings. That methodology must be attentive to multiple constitutive elements of reality (including documents, policy, practices, norms and people) as well as being responsive to participants' own concerns and meanings. In this particular project, that methodology also needed to be appropriate to the practicalities (and impracticalities) of working in the Arctic for a researcher based in Scotland. It must, finally, offer ways of conceptualizing and navigating my embeddedness as a researcher in the research problem. The version of praxiography that I borrowed from Anne Marie Mol met all these needs in the current project (Mol, 2002:31-33). Praxiography combines an "ethnographic sensibility" (Pader, 2014:194) and ethnographic methods practices, with a critique of representational

ethnography and a reconceptualisation of research as discursive praxis. Praxiography enabled me to develop the research problem and arguments in conjunction with the fieldwork and its participants. It also provided a way of theorizing and navigating the inevitable implication of the research in the research object, especially by combining ethnography's empirical potential with a rejection of its colonizing conventions. In this section I describe the praxiographic methodology of the current project, as well as its genealogical and autoethnographic dimensions. I first describe the shape of the project through a discussion of its similarities and differences with conventional ethnography. I then describe some tensions involved in doing praxiographic research in the Canadian Arctic.

### ***Research design and methodology***

Praxiographic research looks very much like ethnography. Praxiography is ethnographic in the sense that it involves “being there” (Geertz, 1988:1), interacting with the people and places involved, talking, listening, and seeing, “hanging out and hanging about” (Woodward, 2008:536), as well as collecting documents. Praxiography also involves the rich, everyday details generated by being reflexively and attentively in a place and carrying that way of being through the analysis and writing processes or “thick description” (Geertz, 1973). All these elements of ethnographic research are present in the current project. In my case, “there” meant Ottawa, Iqaluit, Victoria, Yellowknife and Blachford Lake. “There” meant (but was not limited to) the buildings, cities and land on which the projects were located. The social and environmental features of “there” (I call these ‘place’), were of fundamental importance to participants and were woven into the fabric of their accounts of action. “There” therefore mattered greatly and place is central to the argument in this thesis. “There” was not, however, a single location because the object of the research (agency) was not the setting itself. The current project is therefore “multi-sited” (Marcus, 1995). I “followed” agency wherever the actors or documents I encountered pointed (Latour, 2007).

The current project is also ethnographic in that I avoided predetermining precisely how the research process would unfold in favour of a more grounded,

intuitive and collaborative approach. This included how I arrived at the research problem, methods and cases themselves. I began with a crude and general approach and problem: a desire to research political agency and an understanding of agency as contingently meaningful. I could not know precisely what the research would involve until I began engaging with political agency in a local context. My problem and methodology therefore sharpened through my research, and vice versa. A fuller and more honest account than I have time for here would show how this process began before the PhD. My intellectual commitment to the meaning of political action and my engagements with Indigenous politics and the Canadian North had in fact co-evolved for several years previous.

This flexible, reflexive and reciprocal relation of problem and field helped me refine the problem in the way I have posed it thus far. It led me to Butler's "paradox of subjectivation," (Butler, 1993:15) and Foucault's "critique," (Foucault, 1997). These two accounts of the dilemmas of political agency were particularly resonant and have helped me enormously in articulating the problems faced by anti-colonial actors as well as their relevance to other struggles (see Chapter 2 for a full discussion). I therefore moved repeatedly between the field and the literature, each time narrowing my theoretical focus and further articulating my account of the contestation over a Northern University. This enabled me to see that the stakes of that debate were who could or would act politically and how. My more concrete research practices were also developed in this cyclical and open-ended way. As I describe below, I let the cases I worked with emerge through my engagement with the field. I let my methods emerge similarly. For example, I planned initially to centre interviews. It turned out, however, that participation generated the richest data and that interviews were fairly limited in their potential for the current project. I adapted my methods and analysis accordingly. Perhaps most importantly, this openness left space for the ontological contradictions and inconsistencies that turned out to be characteristic of the field. In all of these senses and for all these reasons, my methodology was ethnographic.

At the same time, my methodology was necessarily distinct from classical ethnography in a number of key ways, for both ethical and ontological or

epistemological reasons. I use Mol's word "praxiography" to mark these distinctions and to try to distance myself from some elements of conventional ethnography (Mol, 2002). I was not researching or representing a culture or a people of any kind. I especially wanted to avoid any pretence or aim of knowing, interpreting or representing Indigenous peoples or culture. This was motivated primarily by ethics. This sort of ethnography, along with its representational, essentializing and homogenizing thinking, have been central to colonization (Wolfe, 1999). I wanted to make colonization an object of the project, not repeat or buy into it. This rejection of the representational logic of conventional ethnography and social science also follows from the way in which I took knowledge to be productive of the realities it describes. I was embedded already in colonial power relations and I became increasingly involved in specific communities and practices through the course of my research. I therefore replaced ethnographic representation with discursive engagement, encounters and interventions (Law, 2004:45; Mol, 2002:31-33).

Instead of representation I aimed to produce knowledge in collaboration with the people I encountered. This echoes aspects of Participatory Action Research, which aims to work 'with' rather than 'on' or 'for' participants (Reason and Bradbury, 2001). Nonetheless the limits (and sometimes myths) of collaborative research in my specific context meant that this is not a Participatory Action Research thesis. Collaboration places high demands on participants. In my experience in the North, collaborative research proposals were also sometimes perceived to be less developed and therefore less authoritative, convincing or legitimate. These two points meant I often got better responses when I approached potential participants with clearly defined and structured requests, rather than asking them to do this work with me. For these reasons, while I conceive of my whole thesis project as 'with' rather than 'on' the people and communities involved, I also recognize the different ways in which they and I have participated. I am the sole writer of this text, for example, despite the many people who have participated in other ways in its production.

Approaching agency praxiographically in these ways allowed me to see and to articulate a central feature of life in the projects I worked with: the existence and

interaction of multiple ontologies and epistemologies, and their relations with multiple forms of agency. This focus was not an initial aim of mine but became increasingly necessary throughout fieldwork. Working in political education projects, participants frequently and explicitly discussed knowledge, ontology and epistemology and how these related to forms of politics or government. Participants were less concerned with the truth of ontology and more concerned with its effects. They therefore did not fully reject or accept any particular ontology, but engaged and combined multiple ontologies self-consciously and strategically. I devote the whole of Chapter 6 to this multiplicity of ontologies at work in Northern higher education and this account plays a crucial role in the way I theorize post-liberal agency in this thesis more generally. My praxiographic approach made this local reality and its significance visible and possible. This builds on Anne-Marie Mol's "politics of what," in which Mol recognizes the political significance of ontology in a similar way (Mol, 2002:172). Unlike in Mol's study, however, in the current thesis participants theorize and practice the politics of ontology explicitly themselves.

Praxiography also allowed me to see and engage a second concern of participants: the collapse of the distinction between theory and practice. Again, this was not an initial concern of the thesis but quickly became one following participants' own concerns with unsettling this division. At both Dechinta and Akitsiraq, students would read and implement scholarly texts in their everyday lives, while the authors of those texts created the projects, taught on them and then went onto write more books. They made no clear distinction between talk about political action and enactments of political action (in fact Dechinta describes itself as both teaching and doing decolonization). This tension is familiar to post-structuralist researchers who connect theory and practice by saying that "discourse produces the effect that it names" (Butler, 1993:2). In the current project, however, I am more interested in how the inseparability of theory and practice is at odds with the temporal conventions of academic research. The process prescribed in my induction week assumed we could separate out 'parts' of knowledge and its production and organize them progressively in linear time. Praxiography allowed me to follow participants' critiques of this version of knowledge and its alignment with the chronotope of late liberalism and settler-colonialism. These positions of participants,

in turn, underlined my use of praxiography which, according to Mol, itself seeks to undermine the distinction between theory and practice (Mol, 2002).

Finally, as I have said previously, praxiography also helped me conceptualize and navigate my own entanglement in the object of research. This entanglement was exacerbated by the blurring of field and theory, by the cases themselves being university projects, and by my increasing involvement as a participant in their activities. As I described in the Introduction, scholarly knowledge has informed, legitimized and enacted colonization (Smith, 1999; Kovach, 2010). It was further complicated in that scholarship is directly implicated in the reorganization, delineation and regulation of realms and modes of authoritative political action particularly (see Chapter 4). In the Canadian North, for example, exclusion from formal education has been used to exclude unqualified Indigenous people from state forms of government by educating (creating) and channeling “the appropriate type of Inuk” into politics (Henderson, 2008:54). If academia is implicated in colonization, I am forced to recognize my own role in it too. Praxiography helped me conceptualize and navigate this problem.

I discuss the ethical dimension to this at length throughout the thesis. Here I wish to note its epistemological implications. I avoided analysing the ‘truth’ or ‘worth’ of what people said. In particular, I did not take a position in the debate over whose approach to decolonization is the ‘right’ one. Instead, I tried to work with participants to understand what agency means for them, in theory and in practice, and then related these meanings and practices to the research problem of non-liberal agency in my analysis (this also served the ethical function of not speaking ‘for’ participants). In letting go of representational claims, I also let go of the conventional markers of wholeness and legitimacy in conventional ethnography. In my interactions with ethnographers, I found these markers to be defined primarily in terms of amount of time or degree of immersion in a research setting. I did not spend an extended period of time in a single setting. The time I spent in each location, and doing fieldwork, was informed by: practical constraints (the expense of life in the Arctic where a loaf of sliced bread costs \$20), access opportunities (which I describe below), and the comparatively (to ‘full understanding’) limited aims of gaining some



insight into some ways some people were articulating and practicing decolonization in their everyday lives. I attempted to isolate practices and moments, for which no sense of a comprehensive whole was possible or necessary.

Similarly, my ‘sampling’ was not intended to be representative of the populations I engaged. Although I began by taking broad snapshots (e.g. trying to interview everyone who had graduated from the Akitsiraq Law School) it became increasingly apparent that the best people to help me think through the problem of agency, were the people who were themselves explicitly politicising and articulating their projects as forms of action, including identifying the tensions between the liberal and other logics and practices available to them. My fieldwork became weighted towards these people and, as I explained in the Introduction, on possibility and optimism, rather than constraint, domination or pessimism. This means I can and do not claim to represent the projects as wholes. This is not to say that I did not take participants’ realities seriously in and of themselves. I hope that what I say about the projects resonates with and would be recognisable to their participants. I am also keen to avoid ‘using’ data purely for ‘my own’ aims, and therefore tried to contribute in as many ways as I could to the successes of the projects in their own terms. The words you are reading now are primarily an attempt to theorize post-liberal agency through Northern education and decolonization. The production of these words as a practice, however, meant much more. This included, for example, my efforts to contribute to the projects, as I describe below.

Before moving onto describe the daily details of putting my praxiographic approach into practice, I want to highlight two other methodological traditions that appear in the thesis: genealogy and autoethnography. Both sit comfortably under the umbrella of praxiography, but both are also particular ways of thinking and it is worth highlighting how they connect with my broader praxiographic approach here. Genealogy is a way of exposing the contingencies of the present and showing how the present has come to be (Foucault & Rabinow, 1984; see also Veyne, 1997). Genealogy is not an effort to tell a comprehensive or causal story of the past. Foucault’s genealogies are collections of moments, events and processes from across history which together are just enough to denaturalize objects that we take for

granted in the present and show how they come to be constituted (like, say, the liberal subject). This thesis is not a genealogy. The thesis is more concerned with an ongoing present than Foucault was, as well as being much narrower in its scope than Foucault's work. Nonetheless, there are genealogical moments and arguments scattered throughout the thesis. My discussion of the emergence of late liberalism in the previous chapter was genealogically informed, as is the entire next chapter on the politics of decolonization in Canada. While I do not offer a genealogy of political agency, its genealogical emergence is evidenced by my historical engagement and very much informs the way I describe participants as inhabiting and contesting their own agency in the present.

I also utilize some elements of autoethnography in a similarly selective way throughout the thesis. Autoethnography examines the researcher's own experiences as instances of broader cultural and social processes in which the research is embedded (Ellingson & Ellis, 2008; Ellis, Adams & Bochner, 2010). This is more than reflexivity because it is not just about my presence in researching an object 'out there' (political agency), it is also about the many ways in which that object operates 'in here' (in my experience and activities in and beyond the research project). While reflexivity is primarily an ethical strategy, autoethnography is a method of addressing the substantive aims of the thesis. As I have described repeatedly, I share many of the same conditions and challenges as participants are facing (although, as a white British researcher, I approach them from a very different angle). I therefore use my own experiences and practices in liberal and academic contexts as 'data' with which to theorize post-liberal agency.

In the description of my methodology so far I have described how praxiography has interacted with an empirical approach to agency and the Canadian North throughout the course of the project. I have described how praxiography combines practice with ethnography as well as how this particular project includes genealogical and autoethnographic moments. My aim in this section is to show the emergence of a research methodology in the process of the research itself instead of preceding it. This cyclical emergence contrasts with more conventional research temporalities, such as those presented in induction week. Conventional research

temporalities, I describe below, align with liberal logics of action and settler-colonialism. I now turn to describe how I put my praxiographic approach into practice.

### **3.2 Case studies: selection, access, methods**

*But Akitsiraq is so unique. How will you be able to generalize?*

Akitsiraq's Northern Director

The empirical ground of this includes the decolonization debate, the movement for an Arctic university, Dechinta and Akistiraq, as well as my own research experience. These are strategically selected cases (Flyvbjerg, 2006). They are also, as I described in the introduction, inseparably entangled. In this section I tell the story of my selection of and practical engagement with these cases. I describe how and why I came to work with the cases that I did. My first aim in telling this story is to help the reader imagine the local contexts for the current thesis. My second aim is to show why education, university education, Dechinta and Akitsiraq are such compelling sites from which to explore forms of political agency.

#### ***Education and a university in the Canadian North***

From the outset of the project, I knew that politics and agency were constituted in practice and in the everyday (see Chapter 2). I also knew that the politics of decolonization offered imperatives and opportunities for researching political action (see Chapter 4, Shaw [2008] and Beier [2005]). I therefore needed a setting which offered me the opportunity to engage people and practices oriented to decolonizing action in everyday ways. Due to the inseparability of settler-colonialism and late liberalism, it is likely that any activity in a settler-colonial context would offer insight into the possibilities for agency within late liberalism. I was interested, however, in the possibilities for imagining post-liberal agency in particular. I was therefore keen to find a setting that might be at, outside or pushing at the limits of

liberalisms. Such a setting would, in its orientation against liberalisms, offer the most potential for imagining post-liberal agency.

Having worked previously with Indigenous communities, it was clear to me that the most appropriate setting would be in education. Education is central to the settler-colonial state (see Chapters 1 and 4). More generally, as Stephen Ball (2013) describes, education produces people (including citizens, consumers and workers) and organizes daily life, as well as constituting simultaneously the state and capitalism as modes of government. Education produces, authorizes and transmits knowledge (including governmental knowledge) [see Chapters 1 and 4]. Education has therefore also been central to strategies and practices of anti-colonial action. My intention in drawing on Ball here is to show that the significance of education is not unique to the Canadian North. Ball identifies these functions of education globally and in the UK specifically. Nonetheless, in the Canadian North these functions are also colonizing. Education has created the colonial state in place of Indigenous forms of governance and attempted to assimilate Indigenous peoples into the dominant culture (Miller, 1996; Alfred, 2005; see Chapter 4).

I also knew the setting would be Northern, and I began in Nunavut. I already had a growing academic interest in Nunavut, had published a paper on it and had begun to make connections with people who lived or were connected with it. This was because Nunavut is the biggest land claim globally (Loukacheva, 2007), and therefore the biggest 'win' in late liberal and state terms. I had therefore become interested in Nunavut and the North more generally as a sort of test ground for what was possible and what was not within those terms. To avoid the problem of imposing my own reading on someone else's activities as political agency, I looked at educational projects in the North that were explicitly and reflexively about politics, government, leadership, change, decolonization and forms of action. As I said in the Introduction, the projects I chose were post-secondary projects because their lack of a stable institution meant they were arguing their case more aggressively *and* because the maturity of their students meant their self-accounts and analyses were more explicit and sophisticated.

I identified three such projects, one of which was the Akitsiraq Law School. I made contact with all three via email and applied for a research licence. A research licence is necessary for all research in Nunavut. Research licensing is in response to the colonizing history of research in the North. The license process is an attempt to grapple back local control (notably, this control occurs through state apparatus and involves a lengthy bureaucratic process). I then made an initial research trip of six weeks in April-May 2011. I first went to Ottawa for two weeks. Ottawa was the location of one of the three projects and of some Akitsiraq graduates and associates. Then I went to Nunavut to meet with participants in these projects. During this initial trip, the boundaries of my case shifted (for the first time). It became clear to me that two of the three projects were not appropriate sites for research. One was over worked and over researched (a common problem in the North which came to shape my experience as a researcher). The other project was largely exclusive of white people. As I describe below, Akitsiraq turned out to be not only accessible and welcoming but also a uniquely compelling site for asking questions about the possibilities and limits of agency in and in relation to juridical law and academia. Juridical law and academia share the logics and practices of late liberalism. As I describe below, Akitsiraq then led me to Dechinta, which became my second main case.

During this initial trip my conversations with participants in all the cases snowballed into conversations with people involved in all sorts of educational activities in Nunavut. This showed me that I had stumbled into something much bigger than any one of the projects: a huge struggle for university education in the Arctic, and over what that education should be like. The case for a Northern university has been made nationally by the National Inuit organisation president Mary Simon, the former Governor General, Michaëlle Jean and the author John Ralston Saul (both of whom have been publicly outspoken about the need for a Northern University), and the Walter Duncan Gordon Foundation (which has funded the ongoing “Dialogue on a Northern University” that I described in the Introduction). The Canadian Social Science and Humanities Research Council and the Government of Canada’s ‘Centres for Excellence’ programs are also increasingly funding research projects related to Northern post-secondary education. As I

described in the Introduction, Dechinta, Akitsiraq, and their individual participants, are all part of this struggle. They are also somewhat marginal to it. The dominant voices are, as I described previously, the state-funded vocational Colleges of the North. Although the two cases are very different, therefore, they perceive each other to be allies. For this reason, I started conceiving of my area of focus as this movement and contestation, and of Dechinta and Akitsiraq as sub-cases or points of micro and ethnographic focus within it. Dechinta and Akitsiraq only make sense in relation to this context and their boundaries within it are unclear.

My encounters with Akitsiraq were through documents, interviews and participant observation. I reviewed all of Akitsiraq's official documents before I left Edinburgh. These helped me get a sense of the project's institutional history, as well as how Akitsiraq portrays itself publically. Because they are mostly aimed at getting government funding and public support, public documentation is one of the central ways in which Akitsiraq tries to engage and mobilize the state narrative of decolonization. They have therefore been a key body of data.

When I arrived, I met with the Northern Director of the Law School and she offered me an office in the Akitsiraq building. She explained that I would need a place in town to meet people because people would "need to stop in for tea". She explained that the office staff (her and a secretary) ate lunch together every day, that this was usually just soup and toast, and that I was welcome to eat with them as long as I bought my share of the groceries. Those lunches with the Director and whoever stopped by turned out to be some of the most important conversations in my fieldwork and provided a sort of continuity and a daily check-in and update as the time went on. They were comfortingly familiar to return to during the second trip.

We talked rarely about my project. I had the sense she was not very interested in it, and that my explanations were inadequate and vague. When she engaged it was to express her concern that my research would not be "generalizable," because Akitsiraq was so "unique". She explained quite early on that I "added legitimacy" to Akitsiraq by being there, by studying and writing about it. Legitimate projects are studied and written about, she said. It was for this reason that I guessed she always

introduced me to others as “our PhD student from Edinburgh”. I also guessed that this introduction offered further legitimacy by lending Akitsiraq a post-graduate and international dimension. I did in fact go on to serve as a connection between Akitsiraq students and students elsewhere, as I describe in the rest of this chapter.

The Director proved to be a pivotal gatekeeper (as well, later, as an employer, collaborator and friend). With her, I participated in the activities of the Law School Society. It was this group of people I was most interested in: the ones articulating the vision and rationale for the project. I sat in on board meetings and ran minor errands for and with the Society in the office. I made a lot of tea for visitors. The Director also helped me navigate local norms. I had contacted all the former students and staff which I had identified from the reports, as well as anyone who might have any sort of perspective on the project, mostly workers in the Departments of Education and Justice. There weren't a lot of replies. I sent another round of emails from Iqaluit. Email did not seem to be the way to contact people in Iqaluit. The Director said, “why don't you just use the phonebook?” I thought that calling people at home seemed intrusive but she did not think so, so I did. Whenever possible I said ‘x suggested I email/call you’ and stressed that I was based in the Akitsiraq office because I felt it offered me credibility and status. This helped. Perhaps, then, we exchanged our legitimizing potential. A lawyer I had met at the airport actually just took me to the office of one of the former students. Again, I thought this would be intrusive but she did not think so. Phone and in-person were better than emails. At some point, when I mentioned a lack of response, the Director said “you should do what they do here – just tell a story”. I started writing emails just telling people what I had been up to and asking for nothing in return. I thought that would seem presumptuous and self-involved and that no-one would want to read that. The Director said it was the way things were done. So I sent those emails. Every new strategy I used, I got one or two more replies. Some people I caught when they came to the office for whatever reason. I would just say ‘hi, nice to meet you’ and chat about whatever came up over tea. Sometimes they would tell me about their Scottish heritage or teach me some Inuktitut (an Inuit language). Later, I would send them an email saying “hi, we met earlier, I'm doing this research”. The longer I had been on

someone's radar in a non-research context, the more likely they were to respond positively to a research request.

The graduates of the Law School were reluctant to agree to interviews. I only got four official interviews out of eleven graduates. I met and talked with other graduates but not in formal or quotable interview form. Everyone in Nunavut is over-researched. The Akitsiraq experience had also, to some extent, politicised the students, as well as having attracted already political students. Those students are more likely to be aware of the entanglement of research with colonial power and more likely to say "no" to research requests. The Akitsiraq graduates had also received an exceptionally huge amount of public and media attention. They had been approached by countless journalists who had, as one explained to me, asked the same questions – and the "wrong questions" – over and over again. To them I was just another one of these people and they were tired of it and uninterested. Worse, that attention had been very traumatic for the students during the program. They felt the pressure of the public gaze – waiting, one graduate told me, either for them to "save" Nunavut or to fail law school. "Who has failed?" was a question students would get asked in the street, another said. Conversely, a local paper reported that the law school was "being billed as a training ground for Nunavut's future leaders" (Spitzer, March 30<sup>th</sup> 2001). The graduates had felt the pressure of these contradictory expectations and become extra sceptical of people who ask questions and write about things.

I am confident that I could have got more interviews with graduates had I pushed harder but I did not push harder. I wanted to truly respect their right to say 'no'. I did not want to be just another researcher. I felt uncomfortable. I also did not find the interviews particularly helpful. The interview setting is a good way to get things out of people who consider themselves experts and like to talk (see below). But for the graduates the interview setting was not so good. At best they were used to promoting and defending the program for journalists not for an academic. One hour is not a very long time to get relaxed with someone. I do not really see my interview data as the way I found something out. Mostly I found something out some other



way – talking to people in kitchens and corridors, piecing things together. Back in my home institution and in writing, however, interview quotes are often much more authoritative and legitimate than kitchen chats or shared feelings, especially in Politics and IR contexts. I found myself searching for formal interview quotes to demonstrate things I knew from more personal and informal interactions. I wanted to demonstrate the relevance and legitimacy of the informal and everyday in my discipline (their exclusion is part of a colonial history), but I also wanted to make my case and be heard. This was an agency and ethics problem, and sometimes a hard balance to strike.

Experts – judges, senior bureaucrats and college staff – agreed to talk to me more readily and talked at more length than the graduates. Those people – everyone except the graduates – talked to me like I knew nothing, especially of local tensions and fault lines. They treated me, it felt, as if I was some silly southern student come North and they had to start from the beginning and tell me how things are. They assumed I was unaffiliated. I might have been some or all of these things at different points. They often had some pre-prepared speech they were used to giving, which did not necessarily align with the questions I was asking them. They talked like what they had to say was the only thing to be said – the uncontested truth. Everyone tried to win me over to their side without letting on that there were ‘sides’ in what I learnt was a highly fraught context. This worked out quite well for me: I was not trying to get at some essential truth, but was more interested in how they deliberately chose to represent and articulate what they were doing, and how they related to what other people were doing. When the president of Arctic College actually ignored my questions and used me to practice a presentation he was planning on giving in the legislature, this was both useful and slightly offensive.

After leaving Nunavut, I followed the activities of the law school online from Edinburgh and kept in regular touch with the Director via Skype. Towards the end of 2011, she told me Akitsiraq was launching some new programming. This involved teaching an intensive three week course at the University of Ottawa Law School called *Arctic Legal Perspectives*, alongside a two week intensive *Legal Skills* course

for students from Nunavut. The third week of the *Legal Perspectives* course involved the University of Ottawa students travelling North. This meant that the two courses overlapped and some shared activities were scheduled. The Director would teach the Ottawa students while a Professor was brought in from the University of Victoria to teach the Nunavut students. The Director invited me to come and participate as a Tutor for the Ottawa students. I accepted gladly and went back, this time on payroll. The funding from this programming was provided by the Federal Government's Department of Indian and Northern Affairs (now called Aboriginal Affairs). For this trip I had the added legitimacy of having come back and of coming in winter (two things researchers are generally perceived as not doing). I also had the opportunity to participate and observe in the classroom setting for the first time. I made a third trip in January 2013 to work with a second iteration of the short-form *Legal Skills* course. Although this was not formally a research trip and I did not generate any data, my ongoing relationship and interaction with the Law School informs my understanding of it.

Returning from my first trip to Nunavut, I was undecided whether Akitsiraq would be my only close-up case, or whether I would need to find another. Akitsiraq itself ended up leading me to the second case: Dechinta Bush University. This time I was employed immediately as a Research Assistant by the project, with the condition and expectation that I incorporate Dechinta into my PhD research. I was sent the job ad by several of the contacts I had made during my initial field trip in Nunavut and (though I did not know this at the time) an Akitsiraq Law School Society member contacted Dechinta and recommended me to them. My wages came from a research council grant to research land-based education and to support the development of Dechinta Bush University. My job was to develop institutional structures, policy and documentation, in collaboration with communities, academics, board members and students. This was ideal for me because questions of governance frequently got at the heart of how Dechinta's participants conceived of the project in relation to colonial and Indigenous forms of government, and they conceived of the program itself as "self-governing" and "decolonizing" (these phrases were repeated across all Dechinta's literature and my discussions with participants).

One of the questions I was asked at interview was “how will the addition of Dechinta change your project?” My answer was that it would involve a broadening of my geographic focus to include the Northwest Territories (NWT), where Dechinta is located, including the NWT’s very different (from Nunavut) material environment and political institutions. The addition of Dechinta would also, I replied, involve Dene who were the majority Indigenous people of the NWT. I explained the significance of this in the Introduction, and explain further in Chapter 4.

This expansion gave me access to an alternate selection of ways of relating to late liberalism. Dechinta and Akitsiraq were an ideal pair of case studies for my research purposes. Akitsiraq aims to “equip Inuit with the tools” of juridical law – to work within the state – in “culturally relevant ways,” as per the understanding of culture in late liberalism (Akitsiraq Law School Society *et al*, 2007; Akitsiraq Law School Society, 2009). Akitsiraq is also supported by and employs the scholars in the liberal narrative described in chapter two. The Law School does all this in the context of the biggest land claim world-wide, and of Inuit claiming and mobilizing their status as Canadian citizens. Dechinta, on the other hand, is more explicitly critical of the state, and privileges bush knowledge and resurgence paradigm logics. The Bush University is driven and supported by as well as employing scholars in the counter narrative. It does all this in the context of Dene land using the language of nationalism against Canada. These two cases therefore gave me examples that aligned with both versions of decolonization (see Chapter 4), and a chance to see what their narratives of political action could and did do. The two cases also gave me more access to the broader dialogue on a university in the North, in which I discovered Dechinta and Akitsiraq were more in tension with mainstream approaches than they were in tension with each other (as I described in the Introduction). That is, while the two projects might have learnt different ways, they did not fit neatly into ‘liberal’ or ‘state’ or ‘otherwise’ boxes, and they worked together rather than in opposition. This early observation was part of complicating the either/or division and beginning to see how strategies from different logics could interact or work together.

I made my first trip to work with Dechinta in summer 2012, and a further two in summer and fall 2013. The trips were two months, two months and a month

respectively. During the first two trips I was based in Yellowknife from where a small private plane leaves for Blachford Lake Lodge, the site of Dechinta programming. Like Akitsiraq, Dechinta is struggling for funding, and during my first year's employment there was no programming running. During my first trip, I conducted interviews with former students and volunteers who were in town, along with board members, and worked in the office running minor errands and developing policy and governance structures for the organization. I made a two-day trip with a supply plane to Blachford Lake to explore the space. Again, it was often informal encounters that gave me the most insight into the project. Again, I encountered a lot of conflict. This was both internal to the organization, in the history of the programming (as reported by students) and around the project in the wider community. Navigating conflict was one of the defining features of my research experience.

My final trip for Dechinta was for its Fall Semester September 2012. The 2012 Fall Semester was the fourth program delivered by Dechinta and the second full-length semester. It included five weeks of preparation off-site and five weeks on-site at Blachford Lake Lodge. There were eight students. Six students were Indigenous and seven students were from the NWT. Students ranged from 18 to 35 years old. Three students were mothers and one student brought her baby on-site with her. Two students had undergraduate degrees (the two non-Indigenous students) and one further student had experience of post-secondary in the South. I was on-site for the final three weeks of this semester, evaluating and facilitating/leading the program in my role as a research assistant. I also supported the students as they prepared for and intervened in a conference on the future of the North the weekend they returned to Yellowknife. I have also drawn heavily on the transcripts from this conference, in which the students tried to articulate their Dechinta experience as decolonizing action, to make a case for certain forms of political action in the North, and to act politically themselves in that context.

### *Notes on consent and confidentiality*

When I began research in Nunavut, I created informed consent forms in both English and Inuktitut, as required by the Nunavut Research Institute which licensed/permitted research in the territory on this condition. The Institute also provided the highly formal and conventional language required. I was aware of large body of literature written against the practice of written informed consent in research with Indigenous communities (Davison, Brown & Moffitt, 2006). I was also aware, anecdotally, of most Canadian university ethics committees exempting such research from written consent procedures. This is due to a lack of written traditions in Indigenous communities and a general wariness of the roles of contracts and signatures in colonization (Casteel, 1996). A critique of contractual ethics points to further limits of informed consent forms and norms. Perhaps unsurprisingly I found my government mandated informed consent forms to be met with hostility by interviewees and other participants. I also found a variety of positions in relation to the Research Institute articulated by academics and other Northerners. Several people told me they thought it was “ridiculous” they should have to appeal to their own government for permission to talk with other people. One academic told me she would apply for a license to research “vulnerable” people (she gave the example of people in their homes), but not government officials who she believed should not require a license to be held to account by the public. For my part, I began to seek verbal consent instead.

My dictaphone was met with similar suspicion and hostility as consent forms. Some people declined to be recorded. Some seemed to shut down to me the moment I suggested it. Again, I started to make a call as to whether to even ask, and often did not. Although I have some fully recorded interviews my primary method for recording was note-taking during the interview. In these ways, I found myself torn between the demands of the Research Institute (the aims of which were to wrestle back control over research in the North from incomers), my own hopes for doing things differently, and the expectations and realities of participants. This was another balance I had to navigate throughout the research process.

Confidentiality presented even more problems. The groups of people I worked with were small and individuals were easily identifiable. I did not want to assume that anonymity was necessarily desirable. The separation of words from person and context in the form of ‘confidentiality’ may be a universalized western value (Harper, 2008). Chapter 6 shows in great detail how this separation is fundamentally opposed to the pedagogy and ontology of place posited by participants. Nonetheless, as I have described, the cases were also riddled with conflicts of various sorts, many of which were deeply personal. On one hand, I felt any account of Northern education had to address these conflicts, especially because the stakes and terms of the conflicts were so often so telling and so high. I did not, however, want to make the projects look bad in public. After all, ultimately I shared their hopes and aims and certainly respected their entitlement to the pursuit and success of their projects. Publishing who said what about whom did not seem like a way to do this. I did not want to break their trust, however implicitly or begrudgingly that trust occurred.

My response to this problem is to refer to people as students, graduates, instructors, board or society members, and advocates. Sometimes when I feel an individual is still easily identifiable, I have been even vaguer and called them a participant, or referred to a group of people as participants and not quoted anyone specifically. I have not attributed interview or fieldnote quotations to specific individuals nor listed the individuals I interviewed. I have also, at times, altered gender pronouns to further hide an individual’s identity. This is not ideal, for the reasons described above and because it sometimes makes the story somewhat intangible or even inaccurate (gender is meaningful). This approach is, however, both necessary and the best strategy available.

My aim in this section has been, quite simply, to describe what I did in the course of the research. The account I have given is of praxiography in practice: a cluster of methods practices that are attentive and responses to local specificities and complexities. I have not attempted to present a neat coherent list but rather have shown some of the practical and ethical challenges and ‘mess’ of conducting a research project, particularly in the Canadian Arctic. It is in all the practices

described here that I produced the experiences, materials and knowledge in relation to political agency that inform the current thesis. I now go onto describe the ethical dilemmas I faced in the research process and in turning the fieldwork into the narrative of this thesis.

### **3.3 Spatio-temporalities of research ethics**

Early anthropologist Bronislaw Malinowski argued that the ethnographer must “go native,” in order to “to grasp the native’s point of view, his relations to life, to realize his vision of his world” (Malinowski, 2014: 24). Conversely, the *SAGE Encyclopedia of Social Science Research Methods* describes “going native,” as the “development of a sense of ‘overrapport’ between the researcher and those “under study,” to the extent that the researcher “becomes” one of those under study” (Fuller, 2004). Along with the hopes or risks of “going native,” social scientists have also become concerned with the limits and possibilities of insider research, outsider research, and their in-betweens (Adler and Adler, 1987). All these points illustrate an age-old question in the social sciences. Should a researcher research communities of which she is part, or become part of the communities she researches? This question is both ethical and epistemological. The first two quotes also show the emergence of this concern in relation to research with Indigenous people specifically.

My engagement with this question is mediated by its articulation in feminist and post-structuralist research because this research most closely aligns with the epistemology and ethics of the current project. This research takes-as-given that the researcher is always already embedded in the reality she seeks to research. This is certainly the case, as I have shown thus far, for researchers in the Canadian north. It is especially troubling for outsider researchers in marginalized communities because, as I have also explained, these researchers risk speaking for others and repeating oppressive power relations. The question then becomes not whether but how she is a part of that reality. Post-structuralist and feminist researchers have developed a number of strategies for articulating and managing this problem: positionality, reflexivity, introspection, deference and silence (Etherington, 2004). These strategies

are also, as Kim Etherington argues, modes of researcher “agency,” (Etherington, 2004:15). They are ways of acting ethically.

In this section I describe how I deployed these strategies in the current project. I also show how, by deploying them with the concerns of agency, decolonization and the North, I exposed some of their limits. In particular, I argue, the strategies are often underpinned by colonial and late liberal spatio-temporalities, as well as autological versions of action. I conclude by discussing the process of creating the arguments of the current thesis. I argue that analysis and writing are also often aligned with liberal logics. I therefore show throughout this section how I practiced ethics during the research and how my own agency in doing so was entangled with my broader academic context (a context which I shared with participants).

### ***Practicing ethics in research***

I begin here by discussing positionality and identity jointly, before moving onto discuss reflexivity, introspection, deference and silence. Identifying or locating oneself as a researcher are, it seems to me, almost prerequisites for critical social science research today. It is taken as given that what Sandra Harding calls the “standpoint” (Harding, 1987:159) of the researcher matters. That is, that the coordinates and subjectivity from which the researcher works and speaks has implications for the research itself. The effects of locating or identifying oneself are two-fold. They are ways of the researcher becoming aware of and attentive to the relations of power between them and their research and their participants. They also call the reader’s attention to that power relationship and make the researcher’s role in it transparent, often inviting the reader to interrogate the researcher’s ethics or credibility. I aim to do all these things in the current project. The logics of positionality and identity also helped me pose an ethical and methodological problem as part of this thesis: whether and how to do anti-colonial research as a scholar who is implicated in colonial power and privilege.



Identifying or positioning myself was, however, not a straightforward task in the context of this project. This task required that I be a fixed, stable and autonomous subject – the very object I sought to critique. Post-structuralism already has provided a critique of the myths and violence of identity politics, as described by Moya Lloyd (2005). I do not repeat this critique here, but rather extend and refocus it on my own experience and on research in Indigenous communities. In this thesis I have repeatedly described my ethical quandary as: ‘The question of whether and how it is possible for me and people like me to do research with Indigenous people in Indigenous contexts.’ I have also described ‘me’ as ‘neither indigenous nor Canadian. I am a PhD student at the University of Edinburgh and I mostly live and work in the UK where I was born and have lived my whole life.’ The problem being that ‘my research... involves indigenous people, colonial power and the place now known as Canada.’ That is, it involves some form of other in relation to which I am historically privileged and possibly an oppressor.

My language in these quotes is awkward because my engagement with the logic is awkward. This expression of myself is slippery, awkward and inadequate. Part of it involves my not being something whilst part involves my being something. Somehow location also plays a role. Perhaps what I am not is easiest to pin down: I am not Indigenous by anyone’s definition. I do not identify as Indigenous and am never identified as such. I do not need to settle what Indigeneity means in order to state this. Having been born and lived since in the UK, the same goes for my lack of Canadianness. This second way in which I’m an outsider takes a backseat to the problem of my non-Indigeness, but it also excludes me from the language and identities of non-Indigenous settler-Canadians. There is a growing academic and activist discourse around settler identity and Indigenous-settler alliances, with settler-Canadians developing their own mechanisms decolonization (for example, in the *Journal of Settler-Colonial Studies*, or in the edited collection *Alliances* [Davis, 2010]). As a British person my colonial privilege happens very differently to that of settler Canadians but there is yet no discussion in the decolonization literature as to how people at a distance, like me, might respond. One function of this thesis is to call for or to begin one.

Unlike what I am not, what I am is much more difficult to pin down. Clearly the UK and the university are key parts of my story and the problem at hand. Geographic location is a conveniently straightforward way of describing myself for the reader. The UK and the University are, however, meaningful in ways that go beyond location. They are more than locations. Simply locating myself is not sufficient in either articulating or addressing the problem. In fact, it seems to avoid articulating or addressing the problem. Saying ‘I am here’ is much simpler than saying what being here means, either for me personally or for the project at hand. In fact, at times I deliberately used location to avoid the problems of identity. Nonetheless even positionality understood as geographic location evokes a version of space that, as Karen Barad describes, aligns with Euclidean and representational geometric logic and therefore with liberalism (Barad, 2007:240 [the same critique applies, Barad argues, to ‘intersectionality’]). This same liberal ontology is the target of Dechinta’s placed-based pedagogy in Chapter 6.

A broader more nuanced version of identity does not seem to do the work I need it to do either. I could say ‘I am British’ but what would that tell you instead? If you had some sense of the complexities of identity, you would know that it does not tell you very much at all – except perhaps that I identify as British. However I do not feel defined by Britishness. I identify more with other things such as cities, my work, my friends, my politics. I just know that someone else might identify me as British, and that in this instance the only way I might have to take full responsibility for my privilege is to say I am British. Alternatively you might take it as a translation of location. Then we are back to the limits of location again. Saying ‘I am British’ does not therefore really tell you what Britishness means for my researching with Indigenous people. It avoids having to tell you what it means. The ethical strategies of identification and positionality can stand in place of an analysis or engagement of the ethics of the researcher in order to “return myself to comfort” (Barker, 2010:321). They also transfer responsibility for the ethics to the reader by leaving it up to them to give my location or identity meaning, to do the analysis and to hold me accountable. In all these ways, saying ‘I am British’ makes me a single, knowable, unified subject and erases my co-production with my research and its context, and

this aligns identity-oriented research ethics with the logics of liberal action I have described thus far. Nonetheless it also matters, and so I keep saying it.

In all these ways the ethical strategies of positionality and identity, while necessary, also intersect with the late liberal and settler colonial realities which I examine in this thesis and which participants sought to resist and rework. Taken along with existing critiques of identity politics, these limits and alignments of identity and positionality in the context of the current research might sound pretty damning. But it was positionality and identity – as practices, as concerns, as ethics – that enabled and drove me to express this very problem in the first place. They are the main strategies available for holding me accountable for my colonial privilege and revealing that accountability to the reader. If I am honest, they are also necessary for the ethical legitimacy and perceived integrity of my work amongst the communities of scholars in which I work and hope to engage. I hope this is not precisely the same “returning myself to comfort” that Adam Barker (2010:321) describes, although certainly it is related. Further, as I have mentioned repeatedly, legitimacy is a desire and risk for research participants themselves as well as for me. For all these reasons, I have both embraced and denounced these strategies. In fact my embracement has led to and enabled my denouncement.

I now discuss reflexivity, introspection, deference and silence, to which I turned when identity and positionality met their limits. Reflexivity, introspection, deference and silence are similarly common to feminist and post-structuralist research and are characteristic of anti-colonial research too. My implication in the research problem and its ethical dimension meant that some kind of self-awareness was necessary. Typically, in research, this awareness happens in the forms of reflexivity. Reflexivity is already extensively theorized and articulated in critical methodological literature (Roulston [2010] and Etherington [2004] do this particularly well). Introspection, deference and silence are less theorized, but in my experience still common practices, particularly for scholars working on decolonization (as evidenced by the settler contributions to Lynne Davis’s *Alliances* [2010]). Once again I applied all these strategies at some point during my research and found that, although they are important, they often align with liberal logics.

Deference, introspection and silence all, I argue, operate around a non-Indigenous/Indigenous binary. They therefore risk reinscribing Indigeneity as a fixed and homogenous category. Like identity and positionality, they can also all work to negate the responsibility of the researcher and support the status quo. Reflexivity, like positionality, also aligns with the geometric logic of late liberalism. Notice the language: mirrors are external and they represent. Finally, all these strategies potentially privilege and centre myself and my agency over that of the people I worked with.

As I described in Chapter 1, I was initially uncertain as to whether I should focus more on myself – and things I associated with me, like colonial power – or on the people I worked with who were often Indigenous. I wanted to take seriously the most extreme implication of academia's colonial history: that anything I said about Indigenous people would be an extension of colonization, simply by virtue of who I am; that I should be silent about anything relating to Indigenous people; that I should defer to their accounts and perspectives at all times; and that I could not truly know or understand their very different realities anyway and so would inevitably warp or incorporate them into my own logic. I also did not want to write myself out of the project (i.e. lie).

At the same time, however, I did not want to make the project about me. I wanted to foreground the agency of the people I was working with, in order not to write them out (again, as in colonial history). I also wanted my research to be taken seriously and not be accused of 'navel gazing' (Maddie Breeze [2014:99-102] discusses the demands of "getting taken seriously" in PhD research). I saw my desire for my research to be taken seriously as political. Writing in the disciplines of Politics and International Relations, I aimed to stretch and question the meaning of politics and the international themselves. This aim required convincing scholars in these disciplines that the people and activities I was working with were 'real politics'. I repeatedly encountered puzzled responses from peers and colleagues in Politics and IR who wondered what I was doing there and thought my research sounded "sort of like anthropology". It often seemed like all the strategies available for making myself visible in the research process (the current discussion, for

example) further alienated me from what Breeze calls “seriousness” (Breeze, 2014:99) in these disciplines. As I described in Chapter 1, these concerns led to uncertainty during the planning stage and a repeatedly shifting focus between myself and the people I worked with. This shifting is replicated in the current thesis, which moves its gaze repeatedly back and forth.

All these concerns limited the epistemological scope, aims and claims of the project. As I have said already, I do not claim or aim to represent Indigenous life or realities. I have simply used my fieldwork encounters to think through a bigger theoretical problem. Despite this, two things remain true. First, although I have done many things other than my thesis research at request of or to contribute to my research communities and participants, I am still deeply uncomfortable with the word ‘use’ here. Second, inevitably some account or understanding – if not representation - of the projects I worked with is contained in this thesis. Equally inevitably, my own voice and my liberal context are overrepresented in this account.

Nonetheless, I chose these risks over complete silence or introspection and simply looking at myself, colonialism liberalism and my own context. I even chose them over total deference to Indigenous points of view. I made these choices for the following reasons. The same historical entanglement of colonialism and research that raised the possibility that I could not speak about Indigenous people and that I should only examine myself also, I suggest, obliges me to speak about them, and to look beyond myself. That is, my implication in colonial power means that I am faced with the choice of either reinscribing that power by default by saying nothing, or at least attempting to resist it by saying something. Part of saying something in this thesis is trying to address the ways in which Indigenous agency has been written out of academic knowledge by refusing to recenter myself and my own agency through introspection. There remains something of a double-bind, here: I assign myself the agency of decolonization, risking repeating the colonial European saviour complex. Whatever my failings here, I want to make clear that the participants in my projects were anything but in need of saving. In almost all of my engagements, the people I worked with were older, more experienced, more qualified, more respected and smarter than I was – and not afraid to take advantage of this disparity! Telling a story

in which Indigenous research participants are these things is another way I seek to counter conventional accounts of Indigenous peoples as vulnerable by definition.

Deference seemed initially like a solution to the limits of silence and introspection. I mean deference to Indigenous people and Indigeneity. This includes fully buying into Indigenous truths as well as following Indigenous methodological norms. This might involve following Indigenous scholarly assertions, arguments or methodologies. It might include following the lead of the Indigenous participants in a particular research project, or the indigenous community in which a particular project is undertaken. It might include focusing things which are important to Indigenous people. It could look like, for example, using oral, story-telling or narrative methodologies. It could look like being critical of the settler-state or academia. It could look like contributing to the projects and goals of the participants in a research project. There are aspects of all of this in the current project, however once again deference seemed to turn on a colonizing fixed and homogenized version of Indigeneity.

Clearly having dialogue with Indigenous people, listening to Indigenous people and following Indigenous self-articulations are necessary for non-Indigenous scholars committed to decolonization and Indigenous self-determination (and indeed self-determination in general). As principles, these are absolutely central to my project. How to put them into practice is, however, far from straightforward. Once again, the assumption that one can simply ‘defer to Indigenous self-articulations’ homogenizes Indigenous people. It also romanticizes them. Part of humanizing anyone is, surely, admitting their fallibility. More than this, it is simply impossible to ‘defer to Indigenous people’. Even the tiny selection of Indigenous voices I have described so far (scholarship, participants, methodology and so-on) holds a huge range of often competing perspectives. The decolonization debate discussed in Chapter 4 is just a slice of this contestation. As in any project or community, interpersonal conflicts and politics are also prevalent. The stories I have told in this chapter about the projects I worked with illustrate this. Even the participants in this thesis research diverged wildly in views and needs. Even a single project or a single individual changed over time. I had to make my own way through this contestation.

I did not necessarily need to decide who was ‘right’, but I had to piece together some version of events. The version contained in this thesis is ultimately my version of events. I could not escape being its author, and I could not escape the requirements for authorship in academia (and, perhaps even narrower, the requirements for authorship of a PhD).

Reflexivity is the strategy I have used most extensively and consistently. As I have said, reflexivity risks repeating colonizing geometries (Barad, 2007:87-71), re-centering the (white, in my case) academic, and even decreasing the legitimacy of the research. Nonetheless, reflexivity and sometimes autoethnography were the ways I kept all these problems open and visible, and how I explored them throughout the project. My self-examination was, however, targeted. It had clearly defined parameters and functions. By making the production and producer of the thesis visible, this was one way of taking seriously the theories of knowledge as embedded and contingent that were proposed by the research participants (and their critiques of academic conventions as not doing so) [see Chapter 6]. I have, however, included reflexive and autoethnographic data and reflection only when it bears on the problem of post-liberal agency and/or on the problem of decolonizing research more generally. This, in turn, led me to the multiple and relational approach to ethics that I described in the introduction and practice throughout the thesis.

### *Writing a thesis*

Returning to my desk in Edinburgh, I had generated fieldnotes from five separate research trips with Dechinta and Akitsiraq. These notes ranged from single words scribbled in a damp notebook in a teepee by firelight before falling asleep, to blow-by-blow accounts of lessons I was sitting in, or events I had just walked out of (in Ottawa, I frequently talked to my dictaphone as I walked from an interview or event to a bus stop). I also had notes, and less often recordings, from twenty individual and group interviews. Finally, I had documents that I had collected both prior to and during my trip, by and around both projects and the broader Northern university discussion. These included newspaper articles, policy documents, publicity, class handouts and photographs of classroom displays and whiteboards. I

now describe the colonizing conventions I once again encountered when it came to turning these materials into a thesis. I focus on writing specifically here. In Chapter 8, I show how I constructed the actual arguments of the thesis.

One of the key aspects of academic work, especially at PhD level, is that the various parts of knowledge production are divided up clearly. A PhD generally has identifiably separable methods, literature, theory and data, for example, if not specific sections dedicated to each. These parts are then represented as having followed a linear temporality. Generally research questions come first, then a methodology, then data collection, then analysis and then writing. This temporality is evidenced in my discussion of my induction week above. Even an approach like “grounded theory” (Glaser and Strauss, 1967), which seeks to create data-informed questions and analysis, is still a linear temporal arrangement of these parts of research. When my PhD induction week presenter told us not to worry, that we would be able to “impose a narrative” later, what she meant was that we would be able to separate out these various parts and organize them in linear time. We would, she was saying, be able to organize our research experience into a narrative including a rationale, methodology, data collection, analysis and conclusions – occurring more or less in that order, and distinguishable from each other. She was telling us that the PhD and research process is messy, but that a thesis is linear and coherent. I have taken great comfort from this throughout the PhD and have self-consciously practiced the shaping of my research experience into narratives at regular intervals. I have reorganised and re-told the constituent parts of research in successive accounts of my PhD. I have tried out these stories on others and assessed how intelligible, convincing and appealing each version seemed.

Each of these narratives was ‘true’ in that it is assembled out of events and practices in my research that really happened. Each of these narratives was one way of doing the sense-making work integral to social research. Yet my separation of theory, methods and fieldwork in these narratives is also only partly true. I show throughout the thesis how these aspects were, in fact, entangled in the contexts in which I have worked. What interests me here, however, is not that they fail to capture the general mess or what the induction week presenter called the “muddling”



of the research process, of my research process – although they do failure to capture it – but how these linear and divisible narratives construct realities which align with liberal and colonizing logics. Linear progressive stories are troubling in colonial contexts. This is so even when those stories eschew crude versions of discovery and enlightenment in favour of a more humble but no less linear/progressive beginnings (problems), middles (research), and ends (arrivals). This telling of the research story is not arbitrary: its temporality, its actors, and its knowledge all align with the spatio-temporalities at work in settler-colonialism and late liberalism. This is one way in which the terms of legitimacy of my own location in the university are the same terms with which participants were also grappling. The reduction of mess in this way in this instance is not arbitrary, but deeply political in the context in which it works.

This research spatio-temporality is echoed again in the literal writing on the thesis, right down to its grammatical conventions. Convention demands that I write about scholars in the present tense. For example, Stephanie Irlbacher-Fox (2012) ‘argues’ that the way academics use tenses universalizes the voices of scholars. Convention also requires that I write about my so-called participants in the past. For example, Stephanie ‘said’ that that writing research participants in the past tense delegitimizes their perspectives. I might even go further and tell you that we were sitting in a pub when Stephanie told me that – but probably not that I was sitting in a pub when I read Irlbacher-Fox, or even when or where I read Irlbacher-Fox. In this way, through tense and location, the scholarly author is both unified and universalised, whilst the ‘lay’ actor is always local, contingent and less authoritative.

This problem was further complicated and exposed in my project where, like others, Stephanie is both an author in my academic field and a participant in my research. Do I refer to her one minute in one way, and the next another? Do I report Stephanie’s words in her book more honestly – using ‘Stephanie said’? Do I start referencing every chat I have in the pub I have about my research? What would this mean for the status of academic knowledge – for the separation of theory and the empirical? The function of this separation is to maintain a hierarchy of knowledge and knower, mapped onto a separation of theory and the empirical and enacted through the use of particular tenses in academic writing. This separation is the target

of the place based pedagogies I describe in Chapter 6. If I reject convention, I risk seeming like I am not fluent in academic language. If I am completely honest, sometimes I took something Stephanie said in a book, looked it up in her book and then referenced it Harvard style to add legitimacy to my writing. Again, I have followed a strategy of multiplicity and relation.

My point here is that these demands for linearity, separation and hierarchy kept pushing back against my attempts to alleviate ethical issues in the research process – attempts which, themselves, were also inextricably bound up in the limits of my research context. I was striving for legitimacy: in my university, with the research participants and, ultimately, also for myself. Of course, I am not only an academic and some of the other things I am, such as a queer feminist, sometimes conflict with the academe. Yet whilst my personal sympathies might align against the university, my experience and subjecthood are to a large extent produced by it. Increasingly these demands were not only external, they were internal – becoming markers by which I could judge my own self-worth. Words like ‘data’ started slipping into my vocabulary, despite my initial objection to their role in my research. I talked about the ‘impact’ of my research to obtain a grant, but did not remove quite all of the strategic language I had incorporated from further iterations of my research proposal. Most of all, I wrote a thesis which can be read and makes sense linearly and which I even agree is more accessible for incorporating this convention. I hope, however, that it can also be read some other way. That is, that I have wedded convention and legitimacy with disruption and alternatives. This is a balance, a response to both needs, but it also a necessary relationship with its own effect. That effect is the argument I make in the thesis.

To summarize, the current thesis is fraught with ethical dilemmas. Rather than resolve these dilemmas, I chose to explore them in the course of the research. I used the established strategies of identity, positionality, reflexivity, deference and silence to understand and navigate my own ethical action and agency as a researcher. By using these strategies in my work with Northern higher education, I showed that they were limited and aligned with the colonizing spatio-temporalities that Northern educators critiqued and resisted. I showed how telling research stories or ‘data

analysis' along with conventions of tense use are often similarly informed by a linear and progressive temporality. There are no easy solutions to these. Like the participants, I am embedded in these logics and looking to them for my own security and legitimacy (as well as that of the anti-colonial arguments I make). I suggest, however, that the multiple and relational workings of agency in the story I tell in the rest of the thesis provide a model for navigating this tricky ethical domain.

## **Conclusion**

This chapter serves two functions in the current thesis. First, the chapter describes my methodological approach and methods practices. The thesis draws on praxiography because praxiography enables my aim of exploring agency empirically and aligns with the critical and queer epistemology that informs that aim. Putting praxiography into practice meant, for me, going to the North, participating in Akitsiraq and Dechinta, interviewing actors and reading a range of documents. Second, the chapter frames and begins the autoethnographic and methodological dimension to the current project. In this dimension, I examine my own experiences in attempting to act ethically in the context of academia. Throughout the thesis, I show that these experiences converged with and were guided by those of the research participants. I therefore use my own activities a site in which to explore agency. I argue that the spatio-temporalities of liberalisms are particularly salient when it comes to imagining or reimagining the meaning of action. I also argue that researcher agency can be productively practiced and theorized as 'post-liberal'. This methodology chapter is the first part of making this argument. In the following chapter I begin my empirical engagement with the politics of decolonization in Canada.

## 4. The politics of decolonization in Canada

This chapter is about what I call the ‘decolonization debate’. The decolonization debate is a controversy as to what anti- or non- colonial political action looks like, given that a central pillar of settler-colonialism is the capture and regulation of what counts as politics. Actors in the decolonization debate include Indigenous and non-Indigenous individuals, organizations, governments and groups of various kinds. They include leaders, activists (from anarchists to human rights advocates), politicians, lawyers and researchers. All the academic literature I reference in this chapter is authored by scholars who are also active in the world beyond academia in a way that reflects or informs their scholarship. Their interactions are often fierce, with resurgence paradigm actors denouncing Indigenous people who engage the state as effectively self-colonizing and self-assimilating (Alfred, 2005:86-87). Anti-colonial activists in Canada, including many participants in the current project, are organizing their lives around their positions in the decolonization debate. As Slash describes, for example, he is torn between whether he is more likely to find agency, as an Indian, in living traditionally off the land and somewhat separately from most of Canada, or by succeeding in formal education and participating as a Canadian citizen (Armstrong, 1998:69).

The decolonization debate is shaped by two clusters of voices. Voices in one cluster suggest decolonization should and can happen within, and adapt, the liberal tools of the settler state (Borrows, 2002; Tully, 2005; Assembly of First Nations, 2014). Voices in the other cluster assert that these tools are inherently colonizing, and that decolonization can only happen outside or against them (Alfred, 2005; Smith, 2005; Coulthard, 2010). The decolonization debate is therefore a concrete version of the agency problem I described in the previous chapter: how to act simultaneously against, to transform and within a set of logics and practices (the settler-colonial state) which sets the terms for action. In my reading, each cluster

includes either an implicit or explicit version of history, power and politics: accounts and interpretations of how colonization happened/happens and what this means for de-, non- or anti- colonial action. In this chapter, I describe the debate as turning on: the location and form of agency involved in treaty-making; the form of (often Indigenous) subject or actor; the modes of action and self-determination available in state-based political strategies, activities and languages today; and the risks of assimilation or recolonization in all these things. I return to these themes repeatedly throughout this Chapter. In all these ways, the decolonization debate is both a product of and an instance of struggles over the meaning of agency political agency. The debate is a concrete version of the problem of agency I have outlined thus far. The debate is also the starting point for my empirical investigation of the contingencies and contestation of political agency in this thesis.

In this chapter, I begin to show the specificities of liberal logics and their challengers in settler-colonial Canada. I later show how these specificities are taken up in the education projects I worked with. In the first section I describe the late liberal narrative of decolonization. I call this cluster of thinking ‘state,’ ‘constitutional,’ or ‘liberal,’ depending on my emphasis. This cluster includes narratives within or aligned with the late liberal settler state. In this cluster treaty-making, Indian Status, Canadian citizenship, Indigenous organization membership, Land Claim negotiations and Self Government agreements all affirm Indigenous individuals as pre-formed political actors and state strategies as mechanisms through which those actors can exercise agency and self-determination strategically. At the same time, in my reading, the discourse of ‘reconciliation’ between settler and Indigenous populations, as well as ‘recognition’ of Indigenous people by the state, both affirm the separateness and fixedness of settler and Indigenous identities and agencies. They also assume the authority of the state to recognize (i.e. enable or condone) Indigenous people and their existence as a group or category. In this line, the violence of the residential school system and assimilation policy are aberrations on the history of Indigenous settler relations in Canada: colonialism is a past event and mistake, rather than a set of distributive (Fraser, 2000), spatial or structural relationships or processes. Space and place are static objects to be owned or managed

as governed through Land Claims. All these logics and practices align with the liberal forms of agency described in the previous chapter.

In the second section I describe the second cluster of voices which is generally known (and self-identifies) as the “paradigm advocating Indigenous resurgence” (Irlbacher-Fox, 2009:4). The resurgence paradigm includes counter-narratives of power, history and politics. These centre critiques of Indigenous engagement with the late liberal state as assimilatory and of the state and liberalism themselves as inherently colonial – contingent on colonizing logics and practices (Alfred, 2005; Smith, 2005). In this line, Indigenous or decolonizing agency cannot be liberal, because it is precisely liberal forms of agency that have worked to colonize in the first place, and because liberal action is impossible without colonization. In addition, colonization is an ongoing process, not an event, and must be understood spatially rather than temporally (Wolfe, 1999). Participants in this cluster therefore attempt to articulate and practice non-liberal forms of politics, actor and agency: on the levels of ontology and epistemology; in daily life and practices; collectively and anarchically; and around Indigeneity as a (often spatial) practice rather than a category. Like the queer and critical accounts of non-liberal agency reviewed in the previous chapter, however, they have an uneasy and slippery relationship to liberalism.

In the first two sections I therefore show how, in the politics of decolonization in Canada, political agency is presented as an either/or problem: either within the late liberal state, or against it. In the third and final section, I return to academia again. I focus particularly closely on theories of alliances between Indigenous and non-Indigenous scholars and scholarship. By ‘alliances’ I do not simply mean co-authoring or direct collaboration between individuals. I mean all the ways in which the work of colonizers, settlers and white people attempts to ally with the goal of decolonization. I show how the same concerns and framing, along with the two clusters of approaches to anti-colonial action, approach the question of whether and how researchers should operate in colonial contexts. I also show, however, how the either/or way of articulating the problem also begins to break

down in practice. The rest of the thesis further undermines and problematizes this way of framing political action and agency.

A note on the word ‘decolonization’: in the academic and activist circles that I engage here, the word ‘decolonization’ is used to describe any action towards creating non-colonial futures. This is far more than simply undoing colonization (i.e. going backwards) as the ‘de’ might suggest (although I do wonder about the temporality implicit in the word – more on this later). It has become increasingly common to use the word ‘decolonization’ instead of ‘post-colonial,’ particularly in settler-colonial contexts. This is in order to recognize the ongoing present of colonialism as well as the nature of colonization as a material process rather than event or ideology, as theorized by Patrick Wolfe [2006] (i.e. ‘ization’ rather than ‘ism’). ‘Decolonization’ also signals a political orientation to that present and a desire to transform it. The emergence of decolonization as an academic concept and concern is a result of the increasing presence of Indigenous and anti-colonial voices in academia in specifically *settler*-colonial contexts, including North America, Latin America and the Middle East. Canadian decolonization scholarship has played a leading role in creating and developing this new field.

## **4.1 State narratives of history and politics**

In 1996 the Canadian Federal Government published a 4000 page history of Aboriginal, settler and state relations in Canada. The report (also known as ‘the RCAP’) was the product of several years of consultation with Indigenous communities by the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples. The RCAP goes beyond the typical scope and language of a state report in its critique of Canada and the Church and its recognition of multiple epistemologies and cosmologies. The RCAP is therefore indicative of the most radical potential of state knowledge and practices. This contrasts with, for example, Canadian Prime Minister Harper stating that Canada “... we [Canada] have no history of colonialism,” (Harper in Ljunggren, 2009). Nonetheless, in this section I show the RCAP to be in alignment with late liberal stories of colonization and decolonization more generally. These stories are generally told by Federal, Provincial and Territorial Governments and courts, as well

as by Indigenous organizations and interest groups of various kinds that work with or within those governments (to be clear, all these Governments include Aboriginal individuals). Alongside the RCAP, I also draw on the various policies and government initiatives that respond to demands for decolonization in the last forty years: land claim agreements, self-government agreements, the truth and reconciliation commission, and the discourses of reconciliation and recognition.

As I described in the previous chapter, late liberalism is the form that “liberal governmentality” has taken as it “responds to a series of legitimacy crises in the wake of anticolonial, new social movements, and new Islamic movements” (Povinelli, 2011: 25). The autological and economic subjects and logics of classical and neo-liberalisms inform and are joined by state and liberal narratives of difference and recognition, in which “culture has become an object that one could possess or insufficiently create” and that is “pliant to legal and social science analysis and political and social incorporation” (Povinelli, 2011: 26). In Canada, this occurs in state narratives of colonization and decolonization. In the last chapter I also argued that linear and progressive temporalities, coupled with (and often organizing) stagnant and universal versions of space, are present across liberalisms (Coulthard, 2010). These spatio-temporalities structure the narratives of decolonization and decolonizing action I describe in this chapter. The specifics of these narratives vary between narrator and location. Nonetheless, the logics of these stories and of political action and agency within them all align with the late liberal state and the versions of liberal agency described in the previous chapter.

The late liberal story of colonization in Canada is often phased, linear and teleological, moving from cooperation, through conflict, and onto reconciliation. J. R. Miller, for example, a well-known historian of Indigenous-settler relations, tells the story from first contact to treaty-making (“cooperation”) to colonization (“coercion”) to resistance, reconciliation and recognition (“confrontation” of the state) [Miller, 2000: chapter titles; see also Miller, 1996, 2009]. The RCAP identifies “stages,” numbered 1-4: “Stage One: Separate Worlds,” “Stage Two: Contact and Co-operation,” “Stage Three: Displacement and Assimilation,” and “Stage Four: Negotiation and Renewal,” (RCAP, 1996: section headings). First contact generally



encompasses some or all of the period between European arrival in the late 1500s and the beginning of treaty-making in 1867. State narratives of first contact tend to focus on variety, on cooperation and on Indigenous agency (RCAP, 1996; Miller, 1996, 2000, 2009). During this period, varied European actors including French and British explorers, traders, officials, missionaries and settlers interacted with equally varied Indigenous groups and nations. Those interactions were often voluntary on the part of Indigenous people and cooperative with Europeans (for example in trade, hunting and guiding). Even conflict or war was a legitimate interaction between two peoples competing for a space. The official narrative, exemplified by the RCAP, stresses the unconstrained and individual agency of Indigenous people and state agents interacting at this time.

Treaty-making is the second phase in this narrative. From 1867 to 1921 the British Crown signed the ‘numbered treaties’ with First Nations in Canada. Treaties assigned land rights to both parties. This usually meant the succession of Indigenous land to Europeans and the assignment of reserve land to Indigenous people. Treaty-making followed the consolidation and creation of the Canadian state through confederation in 1867. Treaty-making facilitated more secure, legal and legitimate access to land by the state and its settler citizens. Each treaty was unique, made with an individual First Nation. Treaties were contracts between nations. They therefore affirmed the national status and diversity of Indigenous peoples. For this reason treaties are highly valued in late liberal narratives of decolonization and in Indigenous communities today (as when the National Chief Atleo says “we are all treaty people” [Assembly of First Nations, 2014]). I want to note two underlying logics of treaties here. First, treaties draw on and enact a relation of property between people and land: they assume that land can be owned, portioned, assigned and signed away. Second, treaties work within a representative political logic: they assume that a person can represent a group or nation, and sign a treaty on behalf of that group or nation. That person and that group are clearly defined, autonomous and legal entities. Taiaiake Alfred (2005:144-151) makes both these arguments. I return to these logics of treaties and their alignment with liberal logics of action in the following chapters.

The 1876 Indian Act re-wrote the state version of Indigenous people from autonomous, varied nations to homogenous, subservient “wards” (not yet but later citizens) of the Canadian state (RCAP Part Two, Section 9). Through the Indian Act, the state recognized “Status Indians” and granted certain legal rights (such as voting, welfare, reserve access and tax exemption) and limits to those Indians. It determined who belonged to a community and who counted as Indian legally and it did so initially around European social values. For example, the Act excluded women who married white men from Indian Status, but not men who married white women. This exclusion aligned with European gender norms (Emberley, 2001). The Indian Act also created a set of political, governing institutions in Indigenous communities with the authority of the Canadian state. It established “Band Councils” in each state-recognised “Band” (no longer nation) of Indians. Officially elected representatives of bands could then interact with the Canadian Government and govern internally with state legitimacy. This was intended to replace pre-existing, often hereditary, systems of governance within Indigenous communities, which were no longer acknowledged by the Canadian state. The new systems aligned with the same norms as Status. All these clauses, with exception of the gender differences (Government of Canada, 1985), remain in the Indian Act (1879) and in force today.

In the liberal narrative, the Indian Act is the mechanism through which communities are able to govern themselves. It is also a primary state marker of Indigenous difference. This legal difference is, as I described, meaningful materially and socially. It is so meaningful that Indigenous groups and individuals have fought for inclusion and equality under the Indian Act (changing, for example, the sexist provisions described above). An effort (a white paper) from the Federal Government to abolish the Indian Act in 1969 was met with a fierce backlash from First Nations (a “red paper”) and is understood within the liberal narrative to have begun a new era of Indigenous activism. In this new era Indigenous political activity was expressed and intelligible within the terms of the state. This activity refused assimilation and demanded recognition of Indigenous difference and Indigenous rights in law. Although the Indian Act actually happened simultaneously with treaty-making, it is not usually located within the treaty-making phase but rather in the next phase –

colonization – because it undermines their autonomy as nations and asserts Canada’s authority over them.

The third phase, “colonization”, is associated with or reduced to assimilation policy (and sometimes, even more narrowly, simply with/to residential schooling). The Gradual Civilization Act (1857) stated that Indians should:

*“be consolidated on few reservations, and provided with ‘permanent individual homes’; that the tribal relation should be abolished; that lands should be allotted in severalty and not in common; that the Indian should speedily become a citizen... enjoy the protection of the law, and be made amenable thereto; that, finally, it was the duty of the Government to afford the Indians all reasonable aid in their preparation for citizenship by educating them in industry and in the arts of civilization”*

Residential schools, which I describe below in greater detail, were the primary vehicle for fulfilling these assimilatory goals and for “killing the Indian in the child,” (Parliament of Canada, Hansard, 2008). Compulsory state-funded, church-run schools attempted to socialize Indian children into settler society and culture through a variety of methods ranging from religious and academic teaching to direct violence efforts. At the same time, traditional practices (like the potlatch in 1884 and the sun dance in 1885) were banned in many communities and previously nomadic peoples were required to settle by law and (government engineered) economic necessity. This drive toward assimilation was fueled and justified by colonial ideas about “savage”, “barbaric” and even “noble” Indians in need of saving, civilizing or even “shepherding out” of existence and the “euthanasia of savage communities,” (Francis, 1992:199; see also Berkhofer, 1979).

Assimilation policy and practices, particularly residential schools, have been the impetus and target of the most recent “reconciliation” and “recognition” phase of liberal decolonization (Truth and Reconciliation Commission, 2014). This phase includes the abolition of residential schools, the introduction of legislation for land claims and self-government agreements, a Truth and Reconciliation Commission around residential schools (including a financial payout for residential school

survivors), a public apology from the Conservative Prime Minister for residential schools, and a general discourse of “recognition” of Aboriginal difference, value and belonging (as per Charles Taylor [1992] or Will Kymlicka [1998]). This shift in the state discourse around Indigenous-state relations has occurred largely through the political action and organizing of Indigenous peoples with and within the Canadian state, especially by the Assembly of First Nations. The generations of residential school survivors and graduates have been especially pivotal in driving this shift. Graduates and survivors left residential schools with the linguistic and cultural capital and political motivation and common ground they needed for attempting to create change in this way. They used this capital to mediate between courtrooms, legislatures and Indigenous communities. I am pointing out the roles of residential school survivors because I do not want to say the late liberal narrative is imposed top-down by a white state. Nor do I want to paint Indigenous people as passive victims.

Alongside recognition this generation of activists also negotiated the possibility of land-claims or “modern treaties” (Alfred, 2005:144). Land claims are agreements between specific Indigenous peoples and the Federal Government. Claims assign specific land ownership and management rights to both parties, usually “extinguish Aboriginal rights,” and are entrenched in constitutional law. An Indigenous people is represented by an Indigenous organization, which is elected by its members. Those members are then “beneficiaries” of any agreement that is made (this language can be found across land claims, and in the Nunavut Land Claim Agreement specifically). The Indigenous organization negotiates the agreement, oversees its implementation and manages any collectively owned or accessed resources on behalf of beneficiaries. In many regions, these organizations have become another layer of government, along with Federal, Territorial and Band governments. Self-government agreements are similar constitutional contracts, made with Indigenous organizations. However they do not assign land rights but rather rights to govern within a specific Indigenous nation or group. Although self-government agreements might permit governance out-with the usual boundaries and norms of the Canadian state, they do so through state mechanisms. This illustrates how, as Elizabeth Povinelli describes, liberal orders can “make room for difference”

without disturbing their “fundamental truths” (Povinelli, 2011:26). Through these forms of government, Indigenous people are assigned agency and can act but only within state terms. Agency in those terms is rights-holding, property ownership and legal recognition. As such it is individual, autological and juridical again.

The Assembly of First Nations also lobbied the Federal Government to establish a Truth and Reconciliation Commission on residential schooling, a payout to residential school survivors and a public apology for residential schooling. The Assembly of First Nations is the organization representing all First Nations governments and band councils in Canada (this does not include Inuit who participated separately in the negotiations). The Truth and Reconciliation Commission recognizes the damage of residential schooling and the Federal Government’s role in it. This recognition is both political and economic. It aims to “heal the relationship” between Aboriginal peoples and the Federal Government, as well as “compensate” financially for trauma experienced (Residential Schools Settlement Agreement, 2008). In this part of the late liberal narrative, colonialism is reduced to residential schooling, and compensation and recognition both happen in money and individually not collectively. Colonialism is limited temporally to events in the past.

This phased late liberal story is told, sanctioned and enacted by the Canadian state, including by Indigenous groups operating within the state, as illustrated by the RCAP. In this late liberal narrative, Indigenous people are a cultural and legal category and they have been oppressed primarily through cultural assimilation and as such they can be un-oppressed through legal and rhetorical recognition and reconciliation. This late liberal story of colonization and decolonization is expressed temporally (apologies for the past and hopes for the future), without recognition of colonialism’s spatial dimension (displacement and dispossession). When the state narrative does reference space or land, it is with with specific, bounded spatial concepts (management and ownership) that still prioritize time (prior occupancy or cultural continuity are conditions of land claims). Actors are assumed to be rights-holding, voting, contracting, representing and land owning autonomous subjects. Action and politics are assumed to happen in legislatures, court rooms, band

councils, board rooms and so-on. There is a complex interrelation here between the effects of Indigenous action on the state, the responses of the state to Indigenous challenges, and the incorporation of Indigenous action into the structures and logics of the state. This is the terrain of struggle that constitutes late liberalism (Povinelli, 2011).

Participants in land claims, self-government, rights, reconciliation and recognition, are diverse and have varied rationales for and interpretations of their engagement. Not all participants buy fully into the state narrative. Indigenous lawyers in particular are simultaneously critical of the ways in which state narratives and mechanisms are potentially colonizing, but nonetheless see hope in and attempt to work with them (John Borrows [2002], discussed below, is the best known example of this). I now review three sets of academic and activist orientations to this story that are sceptical of it, but nonetheless engage it. Sometimes, I argue, their critiques actually rely on the same liberal logics they claim scepticism of. In these federal and constitutional stories, Indigenous actors are legal, state, citizen actors again, with power being exercised bureaucratically and institutionally. These three versions of the liberal story are related and not necessarily mutually exclusive. My goal in reviewing them here is to show how liberal articulations of Indigenous agency and decolonizing action are varied, but that certain logics are also persistent across them.

As I mentioned earlier, one way of reading the history of treaty-making offers is as evidence of a history of nation-to-nation cooperation and recognition between settlers and Indigenous people (Henderson, 1994). Land claims might revive and embody this original spirit of treaty. The state and law can be understood in this vein as a form of ongoing dialogue and therefore as being as varied, contingent and changeable as any dialogue – albeit with asymmetric participation between Indigenous people and settlers thus far (Borrows, 2002). In this line, treaties could create “treaty-federalism,” with Indigenous peoples on a par with other governments within the Canada federation (Henderson, 1994:241). Treaty-federalism sits reasonably comfortably within the Canadian state as it exists (although its full implications – a state founded in treaty and a meeting of equal peoples might not).

The Assembly of First Nations makes this treaty-federalist argument, calling for the renewal and implementation of treaties, and pointing out that “all” Canadians (settler and Indigenous) are “treaty people” (Assembly of First Nations, 2014). There is some debate as to the meaning of treaties themselves (whether they necessarily enact politics as representation and ownership, for example). Ultimately, however, actors are still signatories, beneficiaries and representative Indigenous organizations. Action is still legal and contractual. Power is still held and distributed, albeit more evenly between First Nations and the state rather than being granted to First Nations by the state.

James Tully (2005) suggests that it is possible self-consciously re-imagine and re-articulate the state to be inclusive of Indigenous participants - rather than the state being inherently colonial (or inherently anything). This includes replacing the idea of a unified Canadian ‘nation’ with treaty-federalism as described above, but also showing how settler states are already informed by Indigenous people (or creating a history in which they are). Tully, for example, shows how the US Declaration of Independence was informed by the Iroquois Confederacy and in doing so attempts to enact an already Indigenous US constitution (Tully, 2005). Similarly, in *Canada’s Indigenous Constitution*, Borrows shows how Indigenous law has influenced Canadian federalism (Borrows, 2010). Through re-articulating and re-remembering in these ways, the late liberal settler state might be re-imagined as inclusive, not colonizing, of Indigenous peoples. In this story the nature of reality and governance is beginning to shift. Rather than being taken-as-given or essential, the state is constructed discursively and therefore open to reinvention. That reinvention, however, remains strategic. I return to the meanings of strategy in the context of the current project in Chapter 5.

Finally, in a more radical interpretation, instead of being within the Canadian constitutional order, treaties might be understood as a meeting of different legal or constitutional orders. Keira Ladner, for example, raises this as a possibility but not a reality (Ladner, 2005, 2009). In Ladner’s version, different sorts of actor, agency and action are available, legitimate or visible in different orders, with treaty being the point at which they meet or are translated. In an Indigenous context, she argues,

treaties have a different meaning than in settler and state contexts. When these contexts meet, these two versions of treaty interact but do not necessarily collapse into each other. This narrative is much further removed from that of the state and leaves open questions of how and whether this is possible.

While the narratives of decolonization I have described here are varied, all see some potential in the late liberal state for anti-, un- or de- colonial action. Indeed, many of those narratives are articulated by or with state actors themselves. These accounts of anti-colonial action rest on autological and juridical versions of agency as well as linear progressive temporalities. In land claims, self government agreements, Indigenous organizations and band councils, the actor is taken to be a legal entity capable of buying, managing, signing, electing, representing and so-on. Action happens in law, legislatures and courtrooms. The story that is told about this form of action is phased and forwards-moving. Even when the very dates referenced in the story are concurrent, they are still separated out as if they were successive (as in treaty making and the Indian Act). In the next section I go onto describe challenges to this late liberal narrative of colonization and decolonization. These challenges, I argue, operate around different understandings of history, power and agency.

## **4.2 Counter narratives of power and action**

In this section I review alternate narratives of decolonization. Together these are known commonly as the ‘resurgence paradigm’. ‘Resurgence’ invokes a form of action that is dynamic and goes beyond resistance, beyond any single relation to colonialism, and beyond revival. The resurgence paradigm operates around non-liberal and anti-liberal critiques of the settler state and of attempts to decolonize with or within the state. Within the resurgence paradigm, individuals articulate, assume or practice non-liberal or anti-liberal forms of government, action, actor and agency. With different accounts of power, they produce different accounts of history – of colonization and decolonization. First, they show how liberal and state logics and activities are not neutral mechanisms for redistributing power juridically, but rather assimilatory cultural practices. Treaty-making in particular is not nation-to-nation



negotiation but yet another practice in a series of practices which attempt to reorganize Indigenous life and governance to align with European and state norms. Second, they show how the logics of the settler-state are contingent on colonization and the exclusion of Indigeneity. Third, they show how forms of state recognition – whether in the form of Indian status or the Truth and Reconciliation Commission – are in fact state claims to authority over Indigenous people which assume culture and subjectivity take late liberal forms. Finally, scholars and activists in the resurgence paradigm attempt to articulate and practice forms of politics outside or against the settler state. These include everyday practices of knowledge, culture, relationships to land and community and politics located in books, on barricades and in homes rather than in courtrooms or legislatures.

First, participants in this cluster tend to have an account of power and reality as constituted in everyday or micro practices (Allen, 1998; Alfred, 2005; Smith, 2005). This generates a narrative of colonization and decolonization – especially of treaty-making and land claims – that looks different to that described in the previous section. Assimilation is especially important to this account because it is the everyday reorganization of Indigenous lives and erosion of Indigenous daily cultural practices (and with them the reality they enact) which constitute cultural genocide and colonization (Wolf, 2006: 387). This is an ongoing process occurring from smallpox and wage economy brought by settlers (the resurgence paradigm’s focus in the “first contact” phase) through the making of both numbered and modern treaties. There is a continuous and ongoing logic of colonization throughout Indigenous-settler relations, rather than colonization being a mistake or phase.

Power, in this account, is not simply redistributed through treaties and land claims. Treaties and land claims are conceptualized as everyday practices – reorganizing Indigenous lives, communities and government around the logics, norms and practices of settlers, liberalism and the state. They create new elites – privileging men, English and bureaucratic skills and disrupting hereditary lines, gender balances, Indigenous languages and traditional or land based skills (these are the “brown white men” Slash was talking about). Land Claims are as much of an industry as they are a governmental mechanism, with corresponding economic elites

(Mitchell, 1996). Through land claims and treaties, land is increasingly owned, managed or divided. This contrast with Indigenous tradition in which land is stewarded or itself an agent, governing of Indigenous communities (I describe this at length in Chapter 6). Having a say in the dominant system of government has been a strong incentive for Indigenous involvement in these practices (Alfred, 2005). In these ways, resurgence scholars and activists argue that treaty making is part of the assimilation of ideas and norms around what political action, actors and authority look like.

Second, participants in the resurgence paradigm expose the rationalities and strategies of state politics as necessarily colonial. In one strand of this dimension, the state is by nature an “exclusionary concept rooted in an adversarial and coercive Western notion of power” (Alfred, 2005:83; same idea in Smith, 2005). In this argument the state is founded on colonial power. As such that power cannot be challenged without challenging the state (Alfred, 2005:82). In a second strand, the state is contingent upon a certain version of Indigeneity. In this strand, to engage state politics is to reinscribe the pre-conditional exclusion and inferiority of Indigeneity, and the problematic dichotomies entwined in the historical co-production of state and Indigeneity (Shaw, 2008). Hobbes’ and Rousseau’s barbaric and noble Indian others are most emblematic of this logic and how Indigeneity is a necessary other to state politics (Hobbes, 1996; Rousseau, 1968).

Third, “recognition” reinscribes the state’s authority to do that recognizing and reduces Indigeneity to “cultural difference” rather than a mode of government or spatiality that is fundamentally challenging to liberal government and its legitimacy (Povinelli, 2011). This makes Indigeneity commensurable in the language of liberalism. In an online article for the *the New Socialist* (2006) Glen Coulthard, a Dene scholar and Dechinta creator and instructor, describes the politics of recognition as the “range of recognition-based models of liberal pluralism that... instead of ushering in an era of peaceful coexistence grounded on the ideal of mutuality... promises to reproduce the very configurations of colonial power that indigenous peoples have historically sought to transcend.” Coulthard points to the potentially assimilating effects of engaging in liberal and state politics for Indigenous

peoples: "...the power relations within and against which indigenous demands for recognition are made can subtly shape the subjectivities and worldviews of the indigenous claimants involved." If power works not in juridical or economic ways but in micro level cultural practices what does that mean for Indigenous resistance? Coulthard's argument is common to the resurgence paradigm in which power is understood as operating in everyday ways making the everyday of late liberal politics assimilating.

In these counter narratives of colonial power and history, state and liberal strategies cannot be routes to decolonization. Decolonization must occur in every day practices – in relationships with land and community, in culture, without reinscribing the logics of liberalism, and without need for recognition from the state or settler culture. Decolonization might also occur in practices which challenge the state and settler culture directly. The following are some examples to illustrate the diversity of what resurgence paradigm politics might mean in practice: i. "Self-conscious cultural traditionalism" involves working to strengthen Indigeneity daily lives and communities by living in Indigenous ways. This includes include creating alternative and subsistence economies and practicing traditional forms of art, religion, pedagogy and family (Allen, 1998; Alfred, 2005); ii. The refusal to vote in Canadian or US elections, refusing to give legitimacy to illegally occupying states. iii. Mohawk in Kanawake have expelled a number of white people from their reserve land. iv. Others have occupied sites where development is planned. This includes, notably, the stand-off in Oka in 1990 which began as a peaceful reclaiming of a traditional burial site about to be turned into a golf course but ended violently (I discuss this in Chapter 7. More recently, a blockade of a road in New Brunswick has been erected to prevent shale gas fracking. v. Citing Franz Fanon, Coulthard (2006) argues that "those of us struggling against colonialism must 'turn away' from the assimilative lure of the politics of recognition and begin to direct our struggles toward our own on-the-ground strategies of freedom". These are just a few political activities that draw on resurgence paradigm rationalities.

Reading this section on counter narratives together with the last section on late liberal narratives makes two features of the politics of decolonization clear. First,

there are countless diverse understandings and practices of anti-colonial action. Many First Nations have two or more formal governing structures operating side-by-side with divided bases of legitimacy: traditional government structures (such as tribal councils) are in operation alongside (and against) state-sanctioned Band Councils. Other actors locate their political agency in their daily lives, in books and knowledge, or on barricades. Second, this multiplicity is not a comfortable plurality but rather an intense contestation. Participants in the decolonization debate generally identify or align themselves with one 'side'. They work within either the constitutional or the resurgence paradigm and therefore within or against the late liberal state. What matters for the current thesis is the framing of this question or problem of political action as either/or and as oppositional. In the next section, I discuss further this either/or framing of the problem and show how it is engaged in higher education.

### **4.3 Locating agency and the university**

In this section I argue that the decolonization debate turns on versions of agency. The debate is, in my reading, in large part a debate over what political agency does or should look like. The meaning of agency is a key stake in the debate. Making agency central and explicit in this way can, I suggest, show how the debate has emerged and also some of its limits and contradictions. In particular, I re-emphasise the either/or shape of the decolonization debate and argue that it has become charged and polarized in this way due to the agency problem faced by its participants. My aim in making this argument is to make a case for centering agency and also to begin to denaturalize and question the way that agency is problematized in the decolonization debate in Canada. In the second half of this section I turn my attention to how the decolonization debate plays out in higher education in general. The second section serves to illustrate my argument, to contextualize the current project, and to begin to break down the either/or framing of the problem at hand.

### *Reading agency in*

Participants in the state debate respond to increasing dominance and attempts at assimilation of the liberal state in Canada and the state's roles in colonization. They have reorganized and regulated political authority and around colonial, state and liberal logics, making these the most authoritative modes of knowledge, action and politics. This produces both the imperatives and the dangers of engaging those strategies in a politics of decolonization. As I have described, responses to this problem have played out along two lines, with two sets of options being articulate for what James Tully calls the "arts of resistance and freedom" (Tully, 2000:42). The first set involves the practice of resistance within the dominant "techniques of government", "the structure of domination as a whole," or the "dominant language of western political thought" (Tully, 2000:42). That is, the practice of decolonization within the terms of the late liberal state, including juridical law. The argument here is that legal and financial mechanisms provide the most powerful, legitimate ways to making change happen – and that the settler state is not inherently colonial but rather open to (and possibly already inclusive of) Indigenous intervention and rearticulation.

The second response involves the practice of resistance and freedom "against the structure of domination as a whole," (Tully, 2000:42). That is, efforts to escape or evade the dominant arts of government in late liberalism – in knowledge, cultural, familial, local, environmental and anarchist practices. Tully points out that while the first approach risks assimilation, the second risks invisibility in relation to the dominant, late liberal, arts of government. In this way, Indigenous people and all those seeking to transform colonial power relations seem to be faced with erasure and colonization in both directions: with little space for agency. In this way, the possibilities for action are framed as either/or: inside or outside the late liberal state. Two accounts of power produce two accounts of history. Different accounts of power give different meanings to the same events. Each of these stories produces its own narrative of political action and through each runs versions of agent and agency, to which I turn now.

For scholars in the liberal and constitutional vein, Indigenous people can strategically chose to engage state forms of politics and government to achieve the political goal of decolonization. In treaty making, for example, they were not ‘duped’ somehow but free and rational acting agents. The same goes for modern land claims. This form of agency aligns with state logics making it stronger within those terms (as Tully points out). This form of agency also attributes critical capacity to Indigenous peoples and avoids essentialising or fixing them with some authentic form of Indigeneity from which they cannot stray. In this line, Indigenous peoples can change and adapt just like any other peoples. At the same time, the idea that the state can be altered or reimagined avoids essentializing the state as inherently colonial, or articulating it as one monolithic intentional agent and colonizer. This narrative of anti-colonial action through or with the late liberal state therefore seems to attribute the maximum possible agency to Indigenous people.

The narrative is, however, autological in that it detaches political activities from individual actors by obscuring any way in which engaging those activities might change the actors themselves (as described by Coulthard above). Further, it also risks blaming Indigenous people for their own oppression and as creating the conditions (treaty-making, for example) that have lead to their subordination and colonization. The constitutional approach is also blurry. It does not have the same clear narrative of state accountability that the resurgence paradigm does. This blurriness risks obscuring assimilation by attributing agency to Indigenous peoples and calling assimilatory change adaptation. For example, the idea that Indigenous bureaucrats are strategically deploying state tools obscures the non-neutrality of those tools and the uneven ground on which they are used. In fact this idea misses the non-neutrality of the very idea of ‘tools’ (ie. that Indigenous people can exist separately before and after their deployment and not be produced/changed/colonised in the process). My point here is not to assess the value or accuracy of the late liberal narrative of decolonization but to show that it is informed by understandings of and concerns with agency, as well as that it has implications for the meaning and possibilities of political agency.

In my reading scholars in the resurgence paradigm are similarly concerned and entangled with political agency. For scholars in the resurgence paradigm, colonial power is constituted and must be resisted on micro and epistemological levels. Decolonization happens in or against cultural assimilation and in or against colonial forms of knowledge. In this line, treaty making was never and is never a form of agency or self-determination for Indigenous people – it was and is the further colonisation of Indigenous people and land. Treaties in this line are done largely *to* Indigenous people, sometimes with the aid of corrupt or assimilated Indigenous politicians and bureaucrats. Contemporary Indigenous elites, working within the logics and tools of late-liberalism are puppets or even self-colonisers of the settler-colonial state. There is no ambiguity here over where accountability for colonization lies: with settlers and the liberal state. There is therefore no risk here in somehow holding Indigenous people responsible for their own oppression. There is no risk of obscuring the roles of liberal and state practices in colonial power.

At the same time, however, this attribution of agency (or lack of) articulates Indigenous politicians, bureaucrats and whole nations and communities as victims at best and colonizers at worst. This is much like how Saba Mahmood describes feminists as obscuring women's agency by equating agency with political goals or ends (Mahmood, 2012: 10, 14). The resurgence paradigm also risks leaving single fixed versions of Indigenous authenticity and the state intact. Further, it risks denying voice and visibility and therefore agency with the dominant form of politics in late liberalism, as well as denying critical capacity to those Indigenous actors who choose to engage the state. This denial might repeat colonial Indigenous exclusion. Again, my point here is not to assess the resurgence paradigm but to show how agency is central to its narrative and its potential implications.

There are, as I described, more than merely two narratives of decolonization or two practices of decolonization politics. The decolonization debate includes multiple nuanced forms of political action, located along a spectrum. Many decolonization scholars discuss, relate and combine across different points in that spectrum in practice. I had particular trouble locating some of the more radical constitutional scholars, like Keira Ladner, who acknowledge differing settler and

Indigenous realities and legal orders and their contradictions yet still attempt to find a way to bridge and relate (Ladner, 2009). Nonetheless, even a spectrum has two opposed ends. The closer any account is to one of those ends, the more likely they are to denounce those on the other half of the spectrum.

In this thesis I argue that there is more than opposition at work here. Instead, different forms of political agency and action are, in fact, interrelated and co-constituted in myriad different ways. This argument is drawn from my fieldwork which showed that in everyday life and in practice many anti-colonial actors do not choose one or another form of politics but move between and combine them. Throughout the thesis I show that forms and narratives of action conceived of as liberal or non-liberal are actually intimately entwined, co-produced and co-dependent. Here I want to briefly consider that the same might be true for forms of agency in the decolonization debate, and to point to connections that are already visible in the discussion above. I return to the overall implications of these potential connections for the politics of decolonization in the final chapter.

Versions of agency do seem to travel and repeat across the decolonization debate between supposedly oppositional practices and theories of action. The Indigenous subject in the resurgence paradigm takes on some of the essential qualities of that in the liberal paradigm in the form of ‘authenticity’ or the strategic capacities assumed in “a self-conscious kind of cultural traditionalism” (Alfred and Corntassel, 2005:611). In Kanawake, for example, Mohawk are asserting Band rights to determine membership and reserve access under the Indian Act. They are also employing a biological concept of race inherited from Europeans. Conversely, the constitutional approach buys to some degree into the possible neutrality of explicitly strategic agency itself, and of critical capacity divorced from context, as articulated by the state and liberal democratic politics. Even the most nuanced approaches, like treaty-federalism and Keira Ladner’s (2005, 2009) legal orders, still seem to assume an autonomous individual, capable of standing outside those orders or moving between by rational choice and will. This last point is a key finding from my fieldwork: a liberal idea of choosing the non-liberal. These blurrings, complexities and interrelations are made visible by centering agency in an account of the



decolonization debate in Canada. Talking about agency means talking about forms of action that are not defined by the binary of colonization and resistance, but which still engages the concerns and ethics that motivate the decolonization debate in the first place. This is what I do in the rest of this thesis, beginning with higher education now.

### *Turning to the university*

I now describe how academic work is problematized in and by the decolonization debate in Canada. I argue that researchers seeking to resist the colonizing potential of academic work are faced with another, connected, agency problem. Those researchers include non-Indigenous outsiders like me. I show that the same liberal and counter strands I described above frame and are woven throughout this problem and the research process. I also show, once again, how the divisions between these strands begin to break down in practice. This break down is only just visible in my discussion here, but becomes central in the subsequent chapters.

As I described in the previous chapter, academia has both colonial and liberal heritages, playing central roles in both as well as in the colonization of politics and government specifically. Academia is also the primary site of authoritative knowledge production in Canada, as well as a route to economic security and participation in many aspects of society. Anti-colonial researchers and activists are faced with the question of whether and how to engage academia as a potential site of agency because or despite of its implication in colonization. The problems faced by anti-colonial researchers therefore echoes that of anti-colonial actors more generally. I also described in the last chapter how I personally was faced with the desire and imperative to resist colonizing conventions, but also with the challenge of making myself and my argument legitimate, intelligible and authoritative in academic terms. This was further complicated by my co-ordinates as a non-Indigenous UK-based researcher, and my initial uncertainty around whether to slant the thesis towards liberalism (avoiding the risk speaking for or about Indigenous peoples), or towards Indigenous peoples and alternatives (ensuring they were not written out).

As I described in the introduction, academia's colonial heritage is in part due to the historical relationship between academic and Indigenous forms of knowledge; in part to particular patterns and tendencies within liberal university knowledge; and in part to non-Indigenous academics speaking about or on behalf of Indigenous people, and dominating academic knowledge production more generally. Academic knowledge has driven, justified and legitimized colonization (Smith, 1999). Like formal education more generally, it has also been central to colonization of government and politics that I describe above (Godard, 1990:149; Hoy, 2001; Shoemaker, 2002). Academic knowledge is often written, divisible, representative and universal. Even when it recognizes specificity, there is still a universality in the way it travels globally. It is hard to imagine academic knowledge, in fact, that does not have implications beyond the specific (even when 'generalisability' is rejected). It is equally difficult to imagine an academic actor whose qualification only has meaning in relation to some particular spatio-temporal co-ordinates. The agent of the university is the autological subject. She is the formally qualified professor or the consumer student, who can acquire agency by acquiring knowledge and becoming educated. Academic knowledge is recognized by juridical government.

As one site of liberal and state politics as I described above, academia has therefore become a contested site of decolonizing action: variously approached as a tool for gaining political authority, a tradition open to intervention and Indigenization, and an inherently colonizing form of action. I cannot speak to those who have chosen to disengage from academia entirely, however the resonance with the resurgence paradigm of such a decision should be clear. Those resurgence paradigm activists and scholars who do engage the university are, however, more relevant here. During my fieldwork I encountered a program called *Indigenous Governance* at the University of Victoria. Many leading scholars and activists in the resurgence paradigm teach at or are graduates of this program. The program primarily accepts Indigenous students. Students are expected to act politically beyond the university, maintain connections with their communities, and to use Indigenous epistemologies in their work. Students are rewarded for demonstrating community, political and epistemological values. In our conversations, former students explained to me that they understood the program's aim to be "making

warriors,” and subverting university resources (time, space and money) to political ends. The university was, they argued, ultimately a colonial and neoliberal institution. This approach aligns more closely with Dechinta than with Akitsiraq, as I describe in Chapter 6.

On the other hand are actors who argue that higher education can and should be made relevant to Indigenous people or Indigenized and that more Indigenous graduates and scholars are necessary to decolonization. These actors range from Government and university schemes to get more Indigenous students into education, to Indigenous legal scholars who attempt to change university norms from positions in its mainstream. Dale Turner argues that this is where the decolonization struggle lies and that action is writing and that agency is the forum and language with which to write (Turner, 2006). Unlike resurgence paradigm scholars who do not locate their own agency or self-determination in recognition from society more generally, the assertion of Indigenous knowledge as legitimate university knowledge hangs political legitimacy and agency in part on the intelligibility of that action in wider society. This logic aligns with that of the liberal and constitutional narrative of decolonization. Indeed, voices in this narrative are more often found in Law or Political Science departments than separated into Indigenous Studies. Perhaps they are also found more often in the university than elsewhere. This approach aligns more closely with Akitsiraq than Dechinta, as I describe in Chapter 5.

This short discussion further contextualizes both my own academic work and the educational projects I worked with in my fieldwork. It also illustrates how the decolonization debate is articulated by and informs academic work. Again, the choice seems to be either/or: either academics can refuse colonizing conventions or they can mobilize them. Both options have their own attendant risks of erasure or assimilation. In my case, I could refuse representative, written, generalizable and divisible knowledge or I could reproduce it and use that reproduction strategically. In this thesis, however, I do both. I am honest about the messy, non-linear research process. I treat a range of informal sources with the same authority as more conventional ones (e.g. chats and feelings like books and interviews) and approach

participants' stories as theory. I also make myself and my personal and professional investments and limits explicit.

Straying from convention in these ways did, I felt, make it harder to get my research taken seriously. I risked erasing my commitments to decolonization and my own success from academia by articulating both in ways that were not always visible from the academic mainstream. PhD assessment criteria, supervisions, annual review boards and conferences all kept insisting I make my work intelligible in academic terms. Colleagues and mentors kept pointing out that I had chosen to do a PhD after all. More than this, however, I found I actively sought recognition for political reasons. As I have said I wanted to convince Politics and International Relations scholars that Indigenous politics belong in these disciplines. I wanted to convince academics that tanning a moose is politics, for example, and that Indigenous-state relations are 'international'. I wanted to convince them that everyday talk is a kind of theory. To do this convincing, I would sometimes speak in more authoritative language, referring to 'interviews', not 'conversations,' and 'data', not 'experience'. I also wrote the current doctoral thesis which will provide access for me to legitimacy in and beyond the university, via a title and qualification. I did not wholly buy into the primary form of agency available to me as an academic. In fact, this did not really offer me agency if I wanted to act against convention. But neither could I reject them entirely. Not only am I a product of them, but they were paradoxically necessary to make my argument against them convincing.

I described this process of negotiating conventions and deviations in academia in much greater detail in the previous chapter and introduction to the thesis. Here I want to make a specific point about how the way that the problem is posed in the decolonization debate is reiterated in the way it is understood in academia. I also want to argue that, across scholars concerned with decolonization, as well as in my own practice, it is possible to see the binary begin to blur and to see how multiple forms of action not only coexist but also interact.

## Conclusion

In this Chapter I have described the decolonization debate as a contestation over the meaning of political agency. I showed how two narratives about colonial history and anti-colonial action operate around liberal and counter-liberal understandings of political action. Agency is, I argued, what is at stake in this fierce debate. I have also shown how using agency rather than, say, resistance or transformation, enables a discussion about action as related to settler colonialism and liberal agency but not necessarily defined and determined by that relation. I have also situated research ethics as an agency problem in part shaped by the same liberal educational conditions as the decolonization debate, as well as within/by the debate itself. In the following two chapters I turn to two case studies, Dechinta Bush University and the Akitsirag Law School. I show how these respond to and extend the decolonization debate and the agency problem described here. I also show that how participants understand and navigate this problem in their daily lives looks very different to how it is posed here. Actors in the two projects do not follow the either/or approach of interlocutors in the debate. Instead, they practice many of the forms of action I have described here. They locate their own agency in relations and oscillations between them.

## 5. Late and latent liberalisms

*Capacity and culture, and their interplay, loom as perhaps the most crucial issues facing Nunavut as it enters its second decade.*

(White, 2009:58)

Graham White's (2009) paper, *Governance in Nunavut: Capacity vs Culture*, evaluates Nunavut against the goals of capacity-building and cultural relevance. 2009 marked ten years from Nunavut's creation in 1999. "From its first day," White argues, "the Government of Nunavut has struggled with capacity issues and with the task of imbuing its operations with Inuit values and culture." (White, 2009: 64). He defines "capacity problems" as a "vacancy predicament," and culture as "the attempt to build a truly Inuit government," and shows how the Government of Nunavut is pursuing both (White, 2009:58). White goes onto complicate the pursuit of these two goals. He asks: "Is the unquestioned need to build and maintain governance capacity compatible with the objective of developing an Inuit government?" (*ibid*). White then answers his own question: "capacity building does indeed on occasion run headlong into cultural imperatives" (*ibid*). White cites education as the primary tool for training skilled Inuit leaders or passing on Inuit tradition – for building capacity and reviving culture (*ibid*).

*Capacity vs Culture* exemplifies public dialogue around Inuit and Northern self-determination in Nunavut (see Henderson [2008] or Timpson [2006, 2009] for further examples). White's paper also exemplifies the state and late liberal narrative of politics I described in the previous chapter. In this line, agency and self-determination are understood as capacity and cultural relevance, while political actors are understood as Inuit employees and officials. Formal education is seen as the way to build capacity and to create Inuit political subjects. Crucially, all of this is taken as given: the historical emergence of capacity and culture as political goals, or the state as constituting politics, is erased. Capacity and culture as state and Inuit are

understood as separable, if sometimes competing. This narrative of self-determination exemplifies the liberal or constitutional paradigm I described in Chapter 4.

In this chapter I locate the movement for a Northern university and Akitsiraq Law School in relation to this logic. I introduced this movement and project in Chapters 1 and 2. In this chapter I show how their participants theorize their own action in ways that align with, draw on or adapt the autological and juridical late liberal narrative of decolonization and liberal agency. I argue throughout that this alignment is not passive or submissive and that participants are not duped blindly by the state narrative. Nor is this approach unified. Participants affirm it in a wide range of ways. Nonetheless, I also identify ways in which liberal logics are persistent and latent. They often reemerge, I suggest, in counterintuitive moments. For example, the idea that the state can be strategically subverted to non-state ends assumes an autological separation of actor, rational action and desired outcome. While this chapter is about these liberal logics in Northern education, I also note repeatedly that they are slippery. No moment or practice I describe in this chapter can be fully captured or fixed by the word ‘liberal’. Even the most straightforward examples, such as “making Inuit lawyers,” have potentially disruptive effects (in this case, exposing a contradiction in state logics by pairing “Inuit” with “law”) [Akitsiraq Law School Society, *et al*, 2007]. I note these moments of doubt and disruption in this chapter in order to take them up more fully in the next.

The chapter is organized around three ways in which participants in the movement for a Northern university and in Akitsiraq in particular understand what they are doing. First, participants argue that they are ‘capacity building’. This, I explain, is understood in state-building and development logics, which operate around a juridical version of power and a linear, progressive temporality. Agency in this line is ‘acquired’ like or as skills and resources. The acquisition of agency in this way is liberal progress. The liberal logics of capacity, development and state-building are examined and critiqued extensively already in Peace and Conflict Studies (Richmond, 2010, 2011) and Development Studies (Escobar, 2012). Whilst

Canada is not usually understood as a ‘post-conflict’ or ‘developing’ setting, I show how these same logics are in fact at work in the Arctic in and around education. Second, I discuss how Akitsiraq is “making Inuit lawyers” (Akitsiraq Law School Society *et al*, 2007). Inuit are often understood here in the cultural logic of difference in late liberalism. In this line the Indigenous actor is a rights holder, beneficiary or recognized by a legal category. Actors in this line are qualified and legally recognized individuals. Participants in the projects I worked with, Akitsiraq included, did keep trying to assert difference as something more than a legal category or curriculum. But the educational and legal institutions they were interacting with kept failing or refusing to see difference in this way and insisting difference be articulated in the liberal model of culture instead. The third and final section is about how participants seek legitimacy strategically by appealing to dominant regional and national status, rhetoric and ideas, including appeals to the university, sovereignty, security, Northerness and Indigeneity. Actors do not buy fully into these ideas but rather seek to mobilize them for other ends (usually some other version of self-determination). However, the very idea that they can choose rationally to strategize and even subvert in goal oriented way aligns with the autological versions of agency and action that this strategy seeks to resist. All these accounts by participants of what they are doing align with and are informed by but are not reducible to the late liberal narratives of political agency I described in Chapter 4.

## **5.1 Institutionalizing self-determination**

As I described in Chapter 4, in the late liberal narrative of decolonization a number of state institutions and processes constitute mechanisms for Indigenous self-determination. These include different levels of government, bureaucracy, Indigenous organizations, co-management boards, impact benefit agreements, land claim agreements, self-government agreements and so-on. Agents in these institutional arrangements are individual, qualified and educated politicians, bureaucrats, workers and citizens. Agency is acquired by these agents like an object through education and is then exercised, tool-like, in action. Capacity and self-determination in these terms and as White describes it above, therefore involves the



creation and growth of political institutions, along with the qualification of Inuit as actors in them. This section is about Northern education as a method of capacity building. I describe how proponents of more and better formal education in the North posit formal education as integral to self-determination understood as ‘capacity’. I show how this understanding of agency is bound up in late liberal logics and practices.

In this section I show how participants understand agency as the capacity to act in this within these institutional structures. Proponents of more and better formal education in the North argue, in this line, that education will equip Indigenous people and Northerners with the tools and skills necessary to self-determine in these liberal and state terms. Indeed, as I described in Chapters 1 and 4, formal education has been central to the very creation of these mechanisms of government. First Indigenous people organized politically in and against state schooling. Now, the agents of self-determination are formally educated employees of governments, Indigenous organizations, and in workplaces more generally. In this section I describe these logics as they play out and are articulated in the movement for a Northern university and at Akitsiraq. I show how this is a linear, temporal story in which improvement and empowerment involve moving towards a future through the logic of development. I also show how agency understood as capacity turns on an autological version of agency in this context.

The notion of capacity as agency and the possibility of attaining it through capacity-building practices is the core argument around which proponents of a Northern university make their case. Self-determination in these terms is, they argue, impossible without adequate formal education. According to the National Inuit Organization, for example, “The ability to build the capacity in the Inuit population to take on these [governance] roles is absolutely dependent on the education system” (Nunavut Tungavik Incorporated, 2007: 6). Currently the Government of Nunavut is understaffed and Inuit are underrepresented within it. Population proportionate government was mandated by the Nunavut Land Claim Agreement. Adequate educational provisions in order to achieve this were also mandated by the claim. The

National Inuit Organization has recently taken the Government of Nunavut to court, arguing that it has failed to fulfil the promise of the claim on both counts.

Formal education is so crucial to capacity because, as White explains, in Nunavut a “capacity problem” is understood largely in terms of a “vacancy predicament” (White, 2009). There are simply not enough local residents with the perceived ability or will to staff the government. Nunavummiut (people from Nunavut) lack the formal qualifications associated with working in the modern bureaucracy. They have low school completion rates. They have no Northern university to attend. Across the North, therefore, Southerners are flying into work in these layers of government at huge cost to Northerners (Akitsiraq Law School Society, 20 November 2009). These costs are both financial and social or cultural, as a large portion of government employees are transient outsiders with little knowledge of, or commitment to, the North. Northern jobs are extremely well paid because of their remoteness (there is 40,000 dollar per year ‘Northern allowance’ in addition to normal wages). Recent southern graduates take the opportunity to pay off their student loans and to get experiences, responsibilities and job titles that they would not have access to until much later in their careers in the South. Then they take their taxes and expertise back home to the south. Despite the constant influx of southerners, many jobs are simply left open in the absence of qualified Nunavummiut and the government never reaches ‘full capacity’. In all these ways, education, self-determination and government are closely entwined in Nunavut. For all these reasons, education is seen as the way to fulfill the land claim both in letter (its legal mandate) and in spirit (self-determination). All of these points were made to me repeatedly by Nunavummiut making a case for more and better education in Nunavut.

This is where Akitsiraq comes in. Akitsiraq draws heavily on the rhetoric, logic and practice of capacity-building as self-determination. In our interviews, participants frequently told the story of Akitsiraq as a response to the creation of the new Territory. Two of its founders used the same words to stress to me that “in 1999 there was only one Inuit lawyer”, Paul Okilik, who then became its Premier. They explained to me that they began to imagine an Inuit law school in the run up to the

creation of Nunavut in 1999. After 1999, they then put the law school into action, arguing that the new government was legally mandated to provide post-secondary and legal education. They cite Article 23 in particular (see Akitsiraq Law School Society *et al*, 2007; Akitsiraq Law School Society, 2009; Akitsiraq Law School Society, 20 November 2009). As I said above, Article 23 of the NCLA mandates the Government of Nunavut to hire a “population proportionate” (86% Inuit) workforce and to provide the training that will enable Inuit to fill government jobs. A population proportionate workforce means the Government must hire Inuit lawyers, prosecutors, policy writers, policy analysts and court-workers of various kinds (as well as teachers, administrators, garbage collectors and so-on). Law degrees and post-secondary education more broadly will be necessary for some of these jobs. Inuit must be “equipped”, they assert, with Canadian common law as “invaluable tools to build their society” (Akitsiraq Law School Society *et al*, 2007). They argue that, “the agreement’s conditions call for the territorial government to build self-governing capacity. The Akitsiraq law graduates greatly enhance the territory’s ability to achieve this goal” (Akitsiraq Law School Society *et al*, 2007). To this end the Law School aims to “produce Inuit lawyers” and “future leaders” (*ibid*).

The Akitsiraq Law School Society also makes an economic case. The program will bring funding from outside the Territory to be spent locally: “Funded at ~\$1M per year, the program brings to Nunavut ~ \$500K in supporting funding from national sources each year, with the potential of another ~\$500K annually in project funding for the legal education, seminars and associated writing and research” (Akitsiraq Law School Society, 20 November 2009). In addition, millions of dollars of legal fees are going South. Inuit lawyers, trained in Nunavut, would keep this money North: “within the next 10 years graduates will bring back or retain in Nunavut millions of dollars of salaries and fees which would otherwise be paid and spent in the south every year” (Akitsiraq Law School Society, 20 November 2009). This financial argument speaks to the poverty that characterises much of Indigenous life in Canada. It also speaks in the economic language of neoliberal government in which the success of government and wellbeing of citizens are measured in economic terms. When capacity and agency are understood as money, they can be acquired and exercised with qualifications, employment and wages. This argument

aligns with neoliberal terms in particular which, as David Harvey (2005) and Foucault (2010) describe, reduce power, value and success to economics (see Chapter 2 for a discussion of these thinkers).

In these ways, the Akitsiraq Law School ties its activities firmly to the Land Claim Agreement and articulates Inuit self-determination in the same late liberal terms as the Claim: as something that can be recognized in law and expressed and enacted through state, managerial, bureaucratic, electoral, economic and representational activities. Politics and power are reduced to the formal institutions of government. Individuals, representatives, office-holders and employees with appropriate legal, institutional, bureaucratic and linguistic skills, experiences and qualifications are required to negotiate and implement these new forms of Indigenous self-determination. Agency is something which is acquired and wielded like a skill or tool through training: the Law School equips autonomous Inuit subjects with law so that they can govern themselves. Political subjects and actors are Lawyers, graduates and employees. Political capacity in this line is “bureaucratic effectiveness” and “suitable structures and processes, adequate financial resources, and sufficient staff with the proper training and expertise to develop and implement policies and to deliver services” (White, 2009: 71).

In my view, the emphasis of Akitsiraq on this state narrative of self-determination reflects its co-production with the Land Claim as well as its need for recognition and the attendant funding from government. After being denied funding the Akitsiraq Law School Society has had to repeatedly restate, reassert, and rework the case for the law school. In doing this, they have tried to demonstrate in the Government’s terms why Inuit lawyers are necessary in Nunavut and have made their public case primarily in the terms of the Nunavut Land Claim Agreement, and of social, legal and economic development and capacity building.

The prevalence of this logic of self-determination in Nunavut was made clear to me through participants’ speculations as to the past and future “success” or “failure” of the law school (these words were repeated across my interviews). As I said earlier, the Government of Nunavut denied funding to a second cohort. This resulted in ongoing discussion amongst Akitsiraq’s advocates as to the reason for this

as well as rebuttals and defences against any imagined reason. Akitsiraq Law School Society members believed that they were denied funding because the law school was not perceived to be “successful” in the eyes of the government and general public. They believed that the Government’s idea of a successful law program is one in which most graduates go onto be lawyers. Only two Akitsiraq graduates are practicing lawyers while the rest are policy workers, activists and mothers. This focus on success and its quantifiable measurement is, as I described in Chapter 2, a recurring feature of liberal and late liberalisms.

There were two sets of responses from Akitsiraq’s participants to this perceived accusation of failure. The first was, as I described above, a reiteration of the necessity for Akitsiraq in capacity-building, legal and economic terms. Right at the end of my fieldwork, the Society commissioned a new business consultant to re-draft the business plan to try to demonstrate the Law School’s ‘successes’ so far. The second response of Akitsiraq Law School Society members was to question the government’s definition of success and even of capacity building. Akitsiraq Law School Society members repeatedly insisted that creating activists, policy workers and mothers *was* success, and that these people *were* the agents of Inuit self-determination as much as lawyers. Society members articulated capacity variously as including “critical thinking”, “leadership”, “activism” and the creation of a “critical space”. In fact, one interviewee emphasised the capacity to question government, not just to follow it. Akitsiraq’s public face is therefore constructed in such a way that capacity and success mean “making Inuit lawyers” to a government and business audience but can be interpreted differently in other contexts. Even when participants used the language of capacity building they did not necessarily fully buy into it. I discuss participants’ strategic engagement with capacity and success along with other aspects of government discourse in the third section of this chapter. For now, I mean only to note that participants do not engage the liberal logics of capacity uncritically or exclusively, despite these logics being central to the emergence of the law school and penetrating every corner of Akitsiraq I explored.

In all these ways, Akitsiraq and the broader movement for a Northern university are by their own accounts embedded in the logics and processes of

capacity building in the Canadian North. They are therefore also what Alex Bellamy describes as liberal state-building projects in that they create “liberal polities, economies and societies” under the guise of universalized liberal notions of progress, local empowerment and good governance (Bellamy [2008:4-5] is talking about post-conflict liberal interventionism). In this way the North still looks like the colonial frontier that I described John Locke as concerned with in Chapter 2. In capacity and state building agency is understood as something which can be gained and exercised like a tool. Sometimes this tool is as literal as money. Capacity building understands and produces political agents as educated individuals and therefore autological subjects. This is not to say that these processes directly determine agency in the ways they claim to represent it. What they are also doing but do not say is asserting and regulating a liberal and state version of politics and delineating political action as bureaucratic and institutional. I described the broader historical process of reorganizing politics in these ways in detail in the previous chapter on narratives of colonization. In this section I have shown how the movement for a Northern university and Akitsiraq in particular are located within this history and the late liberal narrative of decolonization. I now move onto examine the production of subjectivity and difference at the law school and its further entanglement with the logics of action in late liberalism.

## **5.2 Codifying difference and subjectivity**

*Nunavut (the Inuktitut word for “our land”) was created April 1, 1999 as a result of the Nunavut Land Claims Agreement. For millennia a major Inuit homeland, Nunavut today is a growing society that blends the strength of its deep Inuit roots and traditions with a new spirit of diversity.*

Government of Nunavut, 2012

In 2003 a Human Rights bill was proposed for the Nunavut, containing a clause against discrimination on the grounds of sexuality. Some Inuit activists, religious leaders and politicians argued that non-heterosexuality violates Inuit and

Indigenous cultural tradition and should therefore not be approved by an Indigenous government. Repeatedly, the bible and Christianity were cited by those against the inclusion of the clause (Henderson, 2008:195). Simultaneously, a growing Indigenous ‘Two-Spirit’ movement was striving to carve out a specifically Indigenous mode of resistance and identity in Canada. The movement centred on the assertion that Two-Spirit people, or *Beardaches*, who took on some or all characteristics of another gender or who had sex with people of the same sex, in fact had valued and recognized roles in Indigenous life prior to colonization; that colonisation, and the introduction of Christianity in particular, were responsible for current heterosexist attitudes (Gilley, 2006:32, 53). The debate over sexuality and rights in Nunavut was just one of many moments when policy and culture have met or been co-articulated. Note that the debate begins with policy and seeks to fix a version of Inuitness in law.

In this section, I describe how difference in Northern education is codified, commodified and neutralized by the state as culture. Note that the debate started with the proposal of a bill, and Indigenous difference was then articulated in relation to that bill. I describe how the Indigenous subject and political actor is articulated as beneficiary, rights-holder, trainee and employee. This is the way difference has been addressed and integrated in late liberalism more generally (see my discussion of Elizabeth Povinelli in Chapter 2). In this section I show how these logics are engaged and produced at Akitsiraq. I show how versions of Indigeneity and subjecthood are co-produced even when they are imagined as opposed. I also argue that despite the prioritization of policy and its logics in enacting culture in Nunavut, policy itself is not fixed or containable. In the sexuality and rights debate, for example, policy triggers a conversation and questioning that goes beyond law.

Ideas about difference are central to decolonizing education (and to decolonization in general). Decolonizing education could mean reconciling a previously settler institution (formal education) with the aim of Indigenous self-determination (and Indigenous culture). Decolonizing education could also mean using education to revitalize Indigenous difference (this latter meaning sees

education as more neutral). Akitsiraq is also defined centrally by a version of difference in its aim of combining university pedagogy and Canadian common law with Inuit pedagogy and traditional law. Akitsiraq's participants do perceive Indigenous people and ways of being to be more than a 'culture' held by a liberal subject or legal citizen. They even recognize Indigenous reality as having entirely different ontology, epistemology and social order and with it different forms of actor, action and agency. Nonetheless, this section shows how the institutions with which Akitsiraq interacts (governments and universities) keep insisting that difference be articulated on their late liberal terms as culture, and Inuit subjects as a legal or bureaucratic category. In this section therefore I describe how both how Akitsiraq appeals to late liberal logics of culture and actor, as well as how liberal logics of agency keep reinserting themselves even when rejected.

In their critiques of recognition, Elizabeth Povinelli (2002) and Glen Coulthard (2006, 2007, 2010) show how late liberal logics of inclusion and difference begin with the state and ask how Indigenous people and culture can or should be included (see Chapters 2 and 4). That is, they centre the state and in doing so require all else to be made intelligible in relation to the state and the dominant culture in order to be recognized or included (Povinelli, 2002). The Nunavut Land Claim Agreement states that the Government of Nunavut must be relevant to its 86% Inuit population. The GN's subsequent IQ policy, states that *Inuit Qaujimajatuqangit* (IQ), or "an Inuit way of doing things", must inform all areas of government, education and public employment (Henderson, 2008:190). IQ takes the form of eight codified principles, decided in a series of conferences including elders and politicians. Alongside IQ policy, Article 23 further requires the government to be culturally relevant in that its labour conditions and political rationales must appeal to or facilitate the Inuit participation necessary to a population proportionate public service. There is also an assumption in Article 23 that hiring Inuit will make the government culturally relevant simply by its being staffed by Inuit. Together, IQ policy and Article 23 impact much of life in Nunavut in which the Government along with Inuit Organizations make up the majority of employment, and both are decentralized across Nunavut's many small communities.



Incorporation of Inuit culture in Nunavut therefore takes two forms. First, it involves codifying and implementing culture in government activities. Second, it involves employing Inuit in Government. Both of these are mandated by the Nunavut Land Claim Agreement directly. Similarly, in education inclusion of Inuit means incorporating Inuit pedagogies and curriculum content, as well as raising numbers of Inuit students and teachers. This includes covering events in Indigenous history, employing Indigenous teachers and assistants, having Indigenous language classes, offering specific support to Indigenous applicants and students, having a “traditional knowledge” component of every class, or having a resident elder in a school or university (all these are the case in Nunavut schools [Mcgregor, 2010]). While these last two examples go some way to recognizing the existence and value of knowledge and actors other than those that conventionally have authority in the school system, by beginning with state education and making it ‘relevant’ or ‘inclusive’, they still privilege the forms of action and authority embodied in the conventional state school system.

As I described in the previous section, participants in Akitsiraq were motivated by and appealed to the Nunavut Land Claim Agreement and to its capacity-building logics, especially when seeking government and business support and funding. In Akitsiraq’s aim to “Northernize” its LLB curriculum the law school also appealed to the principles of cultural relevance embodied in the Nunavut Land Claim Agreement and described here. Different professors did this differently. Common practices included using Northern or Indigenous cases or issues in class. Often “Northernizing” meant beginning with the LLB and adapting it to include cultural specificities, rather than some more reciprocal relationship between juridical law and the North. This is how it was described to me by southern instructors in our interviews. Professors noted repeatedly that their ultimate aim was to deliver an LLB that was recognizable and equivalent in standard to any institution in the South. They told me there were limits to what Northernizing could mean in light of this aim. There were, in fact, diversions from this aim and pedagogical differences. I discuss these complexities in the next chapter.

For now, I want to highlight the similarities between this approach and the late liberal logics of recognition and inclusion described above, in education and beyond. These similarities are echoed in the discussion of capacity building above and legitimacy seeking below: Akitsiraq's appeal to legitimacy within and funding from government and business meant that the Akitsiraq Law School Society often articulated the Indigenous subject and political actor in line with the liberal logics of government and business. In this line, the Indigenous actor is seen not as they are within Indigenous worldviews as entirely different forms of subject (see next chapter), but rather as Canadian citizens with specific legal and cultural attributes. So the self-determining governmental actor is an Inuit beneficiary lawyer or a university educated status Indian, not a person with a specific relationship to land or community (although, in determining status, these things now come into play). They have additional characteristics which are commensurable with, rather than contradictory to, their liberal subjecthood.

In our interviews, members of the Akitsiraq Law School Society repeatedly articulated Indigenous personhood as something other than legal status. Most often, as in Akitsiraq's admissions policy, they understood Indigeneity and authority as a relationship with land and community. Akitsiraq's leaders also reported a broader and sometimes different view of difference in our conversations, not least in their recognition of two entirely different and potentially incommensurable legal orders and ways of knowing. Nonetheless, when they tried to practice a version of difference in which settler law did not dominate they ran into barriers. For example, despite their commitment to the definitive role of Inuit law in the program, students reported to me that Inuit law was repeatedly subordinated to settler law. The Akitsiraq Law School Society are careful to articulate Inuit law not as a past tradition but as ongoing, current, dynamic and adaptive. The Law School is part of conceiving and enacting Inuit law in this way as part of that process (see Akitsiraq Law School Society *et al*, 2007). Yet the Society had trouble joining it with an LLB degree in a way that did not make it an 'add-on,' due in part to the pull of the LLB qualification and the partnership with the University of Victoria. A single Elder taught the Inuit law component and also acted as counsellor to the students. The Elder-in-Residence role which constituted the Inuit law component, was actually only added after the

first year – and then in response to students themselves petitioning the Akitsiraq leadership via a student representative who sits on the Board of Directors. From the second year Akitsiraq stressed the importance of the Inuit law class, along with the Inuktitut language classes, by making them for-credit. Credit by a Southern university constitutes recognition, giving them the same knowledge status as the Euro-Canadian law classes. However, the University of Victoria still required students to take the same number and selection of their conventional LLB classes, meaning that traditional law ended up being in addition to, rather than included in, the usual degree work. This meant that students had to do extra work on top of an already full course load. Students reported that this meant their Inuit law work would fall off the edge, and that they did not feel it had equal status within the program.

Similarly, when the Law School Society tried to incorporate community connections into the admissions criteria and oral evaluations into its curriculum, the Universities of Victoria and Ottawa agreed in principle. When it came to putting these values into practice, however, the bureaucracy and norms of the southern institutions proved resistant to them. University of Victoria representatives insisted that the capacity to complete an LLB must be the ultimate deciding factor in admissions, and that this capacity had to be measured in formal qualifications and previous education. This would discriminate in favour of an Inuk who had pursued these versions of success over, say, community connections. University of Ottawa representatives said they agreed with the principle of oral evaluations but could not process them due to the lack of ways to monitor assessment. Nor could their assessment criteria be changed to align more closely with Northern communication via song as suggested by Northern partners.

At other times, students themselves asserted academic norms. In the short-programming for both Nunavut and Inuit students that Akitsiraq ran in January 2012 and 2013, professors attempted to create classes that were less case-oriented, more talk-oriented and that aligned with multiple ways of thinking about law as in Inuit law (in film, for example). The Northern students, however, requested more of the “real stuff”, by which they meant case law (this quote is from one student and other students in the class echoed her request). The Southern students actually requested a

written test which was not included on their original curriculum. They did not know how to judge their own progress without a written test. In all these ways, despite the efforts of Akitsiraq's leaders, the liberal logics of institutions resisted and persisted. In these ways, value was ultimately embodied in conventional pedagogy and juridical law, with the university retaining the right and role of recognition of other forms of knowledge but also being unable to see some of those forms.

What I have shown here is how the law school replicates a limited version of Indigenous difference as culture. Elizabeth Povinelli describes this as the way in which liberal governmentality responds to the demands of Indigenous difference without disrupting its core autological logics. As I described in the previous section, in capacity-building, the Indigenous agent in this line is a citizen or worker like any other. In this section I have shown how that agent then gains culture held like an object or recognized by a legal category. Alan Cairns (2000) calls this version of Indigeneity "Citizens Plus" (this is the title of Cairns' book). When Akitsiraq privileges the university and the state and describes what it is doing as including or incorporating Indigeneity it is working within this late liberal logic. I have also shown how even when Akitsiraq's leaders attempt to assert a version of Indigeneity as a political or ontological difference rather than a cultural one, liberal logics push back in the form of university norms and institutional arrangements. While I have been concerned with the late liberal logics in this section, I have also drawn a picture of a struggle. I take up the possibilities created in that struggle in the next chapter. Now, I turn to how participants engage in the languages and practices of capacity and culture described thus far, as well as in others, in pursuit of legitimacy.

### 5.3 Seeking legitimacy

*This is Nunavut – "Our Land" – just as Yukon and the Northwest Territories and the entire Arctic Archipelago are "Our Land." And, on this you have my word, we will back our sovereignty over "Our Land" with all the tools at our disposal, including the men and women of our Armed Forces who are launching Operation Lancaster from Iqaluit today.*

Canadian Prime Minister Harper, 2006, in a speech in Nunavut during a “sovereignty exercise”

*We are all seeking legitimacy... but not too much.*

Akitsiraq Law School Society member, 2012

The Akitsiraq Law School Society are strategically and persistently seeking legitimacy for their project. Legitimacy means more than one thing and plays more than one role for Akitsiraq. Legitimacy “means funding, space and support”, one Akitsiraq Law School Society member told me. But legitimacy also means, he went on, recognition that “Inuit can be lawyers too”, “rule themselves”, “speak for themselves”, and that Inuit traditions can be understood as law and as such have the same authority and legitimacy as Euro-Canadian law. In this section, I describe how participants across education in the North, including at Akitsiraq, attempt to gain legitimacy and authority for their projects and points of view for these reasons. I show that they do so by appealing to prevalent national and regional markers of legitimacy. Locally, they appeal to Northerness and Indigeneity as well as to the discourse of capacity building as described above. Nationally, they appeal to sovereignty, security and nationhood. Sometimes they appeal to these things sincerely. At other times they appeal to them more strategically in that they do not necessarily desire these goals but appreciate the political weight they carry and seek to divert it to other ends. In particular, participants often appealed to liberal conceptions of political actor and action to underwrite alternate conceptions of actor and action. Nonetheless, the very idea that this rational and deliberate strategic action is possible looks a lot like autological action and agency again. In this section I first describe the ways in which participants are seeking and mobilizing authoritative institutions and discourses (such as universities and sovereignty). I then move onto examine the autological version of agency underlying this strategy, as well as strategic forms of action more generally.

The participant above, however, recognizes another effect of commensurability: the elevation of the status and legitimacy of Inuit law (and, as I

describe in the next chapter, to destabilize Canadian law). Similarly, the Arctic law school elevates both national and regional perceptions and understanding of Inuit capabilities. External and internalized racist attitudes assume that Inuit are not capable of studying or practicing law. Nunavut residents were, one student reported, “waiting for us to fail – they kept asking”. But participants in the law school were especially keen to show that the law school was “at least” as rigorous as its Southern counterparts. They repeatedly told me that Akitsiraq was in fact more rigorous due to its small class sizes and mature student body. They pointed proudly to the graduate who clerked at the Supreme Court of Canada (a huge prestigious success in the terms of law school). In all these ways participants in the law school were keen to legitimize Akitsiraq, its Inuit participants and its locally specific components including Inuit law. Juridical law, the university, the Nunavut Land Claim Agreement and the state therefore inform the logic of the law school, but also mark its legitimacy and the legitimacy of what it does. Making Indigenous law commensurable with Canadian law and the university is one way of perpetuating liberal governance (Povinelli, 2002, 2012). At the same time, however, the engagement and inhabitation of Canadian law by Inuit could be understood as an agentic practice (Mahmood, 2012).

Akitsiraq Law School participants were aware, however, that they could not seek legitimacy or follow its logics at any cost. The same Society member quoted above continued: “we want it [legitimacy] and we don’t. They could say ‘sure, come join our faculty and follow our policies,’ and we would say ‘no’ because that’s not our mandate.” This Akitsiraq Law School Society member recognizes not only the necessity, but the risks and limits of legitimacy in relation to the Law School’s broader aims. Hence the question: “could a program which responded to conventional Law School standards by teaching ‘mainstream’ law to Inuit students avoid being a tool of assimilation and acculturation?” (Akitsiraq Law School Society *et al*, 2007). As I describe below, tensions and conflicts in the program tended to converge around this line: the simultaneous needs for legitimacy and the maintenance of Indigenous difference.

At the same time, due to the value of culture in late liberalism, Northern and Indigenous difference was also mobilized strategically to validate all sorts of political and educational activity in the North. As I described in reference to the decolonization debate in Chapter Three, Northern or Indigenous authenticity may be taken for granted as a goal but its substance and meaning (what they look like and how to get there) are highly contested. Northerness and Indigeneity were markers of authority in almost any public debate in the North, with everyone appealing to them for legitimacy. In my fieldwork conversations I found that everyone articulated their particular institution or program as the most effective way to build post-secondary and therefore political capacity in Nunavut. Everyone articulated their particular institution or program as the most Inuit, Northern and culturally relevant. The term “bricks and mortar”, for example, came to stand-in for ‘Southern’ and to be the marker of *illegitimacy*. My understanding of this is that it implies that Northern universities will look different because they are Northern in their spatial-configurations. Being confined and stationary in a single building for education (or anything) is a practice that came to the North with settlers (Inuit only moved into houses forcibly or voluntarily in the 1950s [Tester, 2006:5-7]). In my conversations I learnt that uniquely Northern education might more likely involve the land, the internet, and multiple locations or communities. Not to mention there are no actual bricks or mortar in the North.

However, the meaning of the term “bricks and mortar” turned out to be largely irrelevant when it came to the actual use of the term. Interviewees would accuse rival and opposed programs or individuals of being “bricks and mortar”. But they would do so regardless of the content of their proposals. “Bricks and mortar”, “Southern”, “Northern” and “Indigenous” seemed to become detached from any particular referent and re-attached to signify authority in struggles and debates over who got to articulate, control and enact what Northern education should look like. This is true across politics in Nunavut. For example, the content of the IQ principles I described earlier was in fact highly contested when the principles were drafted. Not only did huge disparities and disagreements emerge from the lengthy ‘traditional’ consultation process around the very meaning of *Inuit Qaujimajatuqangit*, but the possibility of incorporating Inuit or Indigenous tradition into a state generated by

colonial powers has been vociferously challenged (Henderson, 2008:190-199). Nonetheless, while the content of culture has been contested, the goal has remained largely intact. There is still a single, knowable and fixed Inuit culture intelligible from within the late liberal state.

A final set of markers of legitimacy to which education advocates appealed was that of Canadian sovereignty, security and nationhood. Although political (and economic) development and capacity in the North are now languages of Indigenous self-determination, they are also part of a broader narrative that precedes Indigenous constitutional activism (Dickerson, 1992). The Arctic is an historically strategic and contested site of international sovereignty assertions and disputes. This began between fishing and whaling vessels in the later 1800s and was amplified during the Cold War (Mitchell, 1996). Tensions have been revived recently through recent international attention to the melting Northwest Passage. This attention has been enacted by the Harper Government primarily through military “sovereignty exercises” (e.g. Harper, 2006). Northern Indigenous peoples and Inuit especially have, however, attempted to write themselves and their wellbeing into this sovereignty discourse (Byers, 2009). Again, this is not new: during the Cold War Canada claimed Inuit as its citizens for the first time in order to mark its sovereignty in the Arctic (Tester and Kulchyski 1994). This involved the creation of the welfare state in the North (assimilation, including education) and even the forced relocation of some Inuit communities to strategic locations.

During my fieldwork, however, Indigenous groups themselves attempted to intervene in and mobilize this energy and attention around Arctic sovereignty to their own ends. They argued that Arctic sovereignty is not just about military presence, but can also be served by prosperous Indigenous communities in the North. For example, the Inuit Declaration on Arctic Sovereignty states: “The foundation, projection and enjoyment of Arctic foreign rights require healthy and sustainable communities in the Arctic. In this sense ‘sovereignty begins at home’” (Inuit Circumpolar Council, 2012). In these ways, Canada’s development of its North, including Northern Indigenous peoples, is therefore written into its national narrative (its national anthem includes the line “the true North strong and free”). Included in



this narrative is a sense of Canadian benevolence compared to its international competitors. Northern Indigenous people are now seeking to engage this entanglement and work strategically within it.

Proponents of a Northern university have all attempted to engage this logic. For example, John Ralston Saul (1999), a well-known Canadian author and advocate of a Northern university, argues in a blog post that: “We remain the only circumpolar country without Northern or Arctic universities. This is a fundamental Canadian failure.” I described in the introduction how the funders of much of the movement for a Northern university, the Walter Duncan Gordon Foundation, “aspires to the ideal of a sovereign Canada that is dedicated to the security and wellbeing of all Canadians and committed to tolerance, pluralism and democratic participation” (Walter Duncan Gordon Foundation, 2013). The Foundation also says it is also committed to a form of Canadian Nationalism is “founded on those values fundamental to Canadians, and designed to foster the continuing evolution of a dynamic and independent Canada,” (*ibid*). More recently, however, the Foundation has become open about its use of “Arctic security as a bargaining chip” and denounced this strategy as ineffectual (Lajeunesse, 2013:2-22).

There are therefore diverse markers of legitimacy in the North, including the university, settler law, the Canadian state, capacity, culture, Northernness, Indigeneness, sovereignty, security and nationhood for legitimacy and authority. What these markers have in common, however, is circulating liberal logics of action. I have shown in this chapter and previous chapters how all operate around autological versions of agency. My aim is not to reduce these varied entities to liberalism, but to argue that liberalism connects them. I have also shown that “seeking legitimacy,” in late liberalism and all this diversity is not a single action or approach but varies depending on what participants are trying to achieve and who their audience is. It also operates on a spectrum from proud claims to Canadianness, to cynical mobilization of fears around Arctic security. At the former end of this spectrum participants’ expressed a commitment to late liberal values and ideas. At the latter end they were more strategic in an attempt to mobilize the weight and dominance of late liberal narratives of action in the eyes of government and the

general public. Sometimes participants recognized the limits and dangers for their own interests of these bids for legitimacy, including that “too much” legitimacy might result in colonial assimilation. Nonetheless, even when participants recognize the contingencies or violence of liberal narratives of action, they still end up articulating a version of liberal agency in the notion that they can choose to mobilize them (or even refuse them) strategically. I now turn to discuss this tension and the logics of strategic action in bids for legitimacy as well as in northern educational activism more generally.

### *Acting strategically*

There are two strands of strategic thinking running through Northern education. First, participants are mobilizing the language and authority of late liberal forms of politics towards other ends. For example, as I described in the previous section, they are strategically seeking legitimacy by engaging discourses of culture and capacity. Second, participants often recognize more than one form of being, knowing and acting at play but believe they can choose between them strategically as it suits them. These two strands are two configurations of liberalism and its alternatives. I argue that both cases are articulated autologically. In both, participants believe they can act deliberately and rationally towards an end-goal and that actor, action and outcome are separable and connected through linear, progressive time.

The strategic deployment of politically salient ideas was common to all the projects I worked with in the course of my fieldwork. Participants wanted recognition, support and funding simply to enable their projects to exist. This is made explicit in the Foundation’s discussion of sovereignty as a political “bargaining chip” (Lajeunesse, 2013:2) and the Akitsiraq Law School Society member’s bid for “legitimacy... but not too much”, as I discussed and referenced above. As I also described, participants also drew on late liberal logics to assert the status of Inuit law. In other projects participants sought to demonstrate the legitimacy of Indigenous knowledge and ways of being more generally. Often the true object of such a bid for legitimacy and status ran counter to the logic of that which was being used to legitimize it. For example, the state version of culture contrasts with a version of

Indigeneity as a relationship to land. The former was, however, frequently used to elevate or facilitate the latter. In the next chapter I discuss the ambiguities and possibilities at work here. For now, I want simply to note that the idea one story about action can be told strategically in order to facilitate another obscures the fact that there is a logic of action at work in the notion of ‘strategy’.

The same logic of strategy persists when participants are not bidding for recognition but rather recognize two realities at work side-by-side. Participants often maintained a sort of liberal supra-subjectivity in their perception of the ability to pick and choose strategically between the two. Akitsiraq interviewees repeatedly recognized the operation of two realities with two forms of government simultaneously. One told me, for example, that different laws operate out on the sea ice than do in town. Another told me that when he encountered a problem, he would immediately think of which law would be more useful. A third told me that if the Government made “bad laws”, Inuit would just follow Inuit laws instead. Just to re-emphasise, ‘law’ here means more than simply rules. Law enacts ways of being, knowing and acting (Borrows, 2002). A member of the Department of Justice told me that when there was an act of violence, both Inuit and settler laws were triggered into action and there would always be two responses to such an act. This recognizes and enacts the possibility of non-liberal forms of agency.

Yet at the same time a very liberal, almost consumer model of ‘choice’ underlies the possibilities of selecting or moving deliberately between them. Participants somewhat awkwardly suggested it was possible to choose rationally and individually some form of reality where rational and individual choice is less possible. Again, the subject is detached from that form, able to choose freely and individually and the historical specificity of these different forms of subjectivity and action are erased. This ultimately makes difference commensurable and integrates it within the logic of late liberalism. This time this happens even when participants are ‘choosing’ to reject liberal logics and it happens on a deep and sometimes implicit level. This is what Saba Mahmood is talking about when she argues that the idea of subversion risks repeating liberal logics of action (Mahmood, 2012:20-22).

My intention here is not to dismiss the potential changes attendant to state or liberal legitimacy and recognition, or the value and necessities of gaining authority and legitimacy. Nor is my intention to ignore the other realities and ways of being that are legitimized or chosen, or to ignore the non-strategic forms of action that are at work simultaneously. I discuss these at length in the next chapter. Here, however, I want to argue that the idea that non-liberal forms of action can be *chosen strategically* appeals at least in part to liberal logics of choice and strategy. These logics are autological and linear progressive. The logics assume a subject can act rationally and strategically towards a future end point. The idea of strategically enacting a reality in which strategy is not a mode of action is, of course, somewhat contradictory and awkward. I deal with this paradox and awkwardness in the following chapter. This is a tense, paradoxical analysis which I also take up in the next chapter. For now I mean to show that in seeking legitimacy, autological and late liberal rationalities of action are, therefore, latent even in the so-called ‘choice’ to reject or redirect them.

## **Conclusion**

This chapter has shown some of the ways in which liberal logics operate in the movement for a Northern university and at the Akitsiraq Law School in particular. Late liberal notions of culture and capacity provide the impetus, rationale and legitimacy for higher education in the North. Latent autological versions of agency persist when participants articulate what they are doing as strategic. Akitsiraq therefore aligns in many ways with the constitutional narrative of decolonization that I described in Chapter 4. It does not do so entirely, however. As I have indicated, participants do attempt to redefine culture and capacity and they do create tensions and paradoxes in the ways they engage these discourses. Nonetheless, the liberal logics of the higher education and governmental institutions with which they interact often take precedent or persist. Taken together then the activities I have described in this chapter demonstrate the salience and repetition of late liberal logics of agency. My description also shows, however, that participants rarely understand what they are doing in these logics alone.

It should be clear by now that no practice or articulation of agency happens in isolation. Each is entangled with its socio-historical context, including with other forms of agency, in very specific ways. Each of the above sections overlaps and interrelates with the others. Culture or capacity might be understood as goals. White understands them as competing goals. Historically situating the emergence of these goals, however, shows that they have been and continue to be co-constituted with the liberal settler state (this story is told across the last chapter and this one). Although each section focuses on specific accounts of agency that align with their late liberal context, no section neatly contains or brackets those accounts as only liberal. Each section highlights moments where some alternative seems visible or possible and where I have pointed to their overflow into Chapter 6. In the next chapter, I go on to explore some of these breakdowns and alternatives.

## 6. Pedagogies of place

*At Dechinta, one doesn't just learn about decolonization, Dechinta is  
a practice of decolonization.*

Dechinta students' statement to the press, 2011

In August 2012 I was on a Dechinta weekly conference call about the upcoming semester, which was due to begin in early September. An instructor on the call mentioned a new book that was coming out: Alice Legat's *Walking the Land, Feeding the Fire*. He had received an advanced copy. The book is about how the Tlicho (pronounced 'kley-choh') Dene "become knowledgeable" (Legat, 2012:30). Dechinta is on Tlicho Dene land. Alice Legat is a white anthropologist, who sits on Dechinta's advisory committee, and has lived and worked in the North for a long time. In *Walking the Land*, Legat argues that the Tlicho Dene become knowledgeable in relation to a place, by walking and story-telling in or with that place. In fact, becoming knowledgeable also means to come into being as a knower or actor. In this way place ties being and knowing together inseparably, making being and knowing a situated, dynamic and "spatial" processes (*ibid*). During the conference call, I listened as a member of the Board of Directors discussed *Walking the Land* with the instructor who had raised it. They both agreed that "this is exactly what we are doing" (the instructor), and that for Dechinta's third semester, the book should go on the reading list. I immediately ordered a copy of the book and read it on the plane on my way to Canada for the semester. It was then the first book that the students read when they arrived on site. Seven of the nine students were Dene, and two were Tlicho Dene specifically. The Dene students were therefore reading an ethnography of their own people by a non-Dene anthropologist.

The students felt the book resonated strongly with their experiences, and together they used its vocabulary and account to construct a framework for making

sense of their activities in the rest of the semester. The concept they fixed on was “knowing two ways” (Legat, 2012:4). The concept of knowing two ways, Legat explains, was first advised by Grand Chief Jimmy Bruneau. The concept has since been taken up by the Tlicho Dene Legat worked with, along with the ideas of “doing” and “being” “two ways” and becoming “strong like two people” (*ibid*). The “two ways” Legat describes are the Tlicho way and the Kweet’ii (white) way, and include two languages and two knowledge systems. These words became almost mantra-like, with the students repeating them several times a day throughout the semester. What the “two ways” were comprised of varied and included the bush and the university, Indigenous and non-Indigenous, property and reciprocal relations to land, and the state and self-governance, amongst other pairs. “Two ways” were at work, according to the students, at Dechinta and in their own lives, both inadvertently and deliberately.

This short story illustrates the three themes of this chapter: place, critique and ambiguity. In the story, we can see how Dechinta’s participants theorize place and attempt to intervene in knowledge (including blurring the line between theory and practice). We can also see how “two ways” operates ambiguously without any fixed definition. Place, critique and ambiguity are all ways in which participants in Dechinta understand and articulate what they are doing more generally. Each, I argue, points to a way of thinking about post-liberal agency. Participants’ spatio-temporal practices or ‘place’ points to a form of action that is not aligned with the chronotope of late liberalism. Participants’ knowledge practices or ‘critique’ intervenes in the autological agency on an ontological and epistemological level, as well as making room for imagining alternatives. Ambiguity and indeterminacy enable participants to do this. Ambiguity and indeterminacy also constitute, I argue, distinctly unliberal features of action themselves. The story above illustrates all three elements of the chapter and their interconnections. So do all the stories I tell in the chapter. Participants themselves deliberately weaved together aspects of life which are separated in liberal logics. For example, as Legat describes, the Tlicho Dene collapse knowing and being through place. Throughout the chapter I return to the themes of interconnection and indivisibility.

This chapter is stylistically different to the other chapters in this thesis. I tell more stories. I tell stories because they capture the contingencies and entanglements of the forms of agency articulated by participants in Dechinta. They also capture the fleeting sense of possibility that I found necessary to considering post-liberal agency. I return to the meaning of fleeting senses of possibilities in the final section of this chapter. These stories are not intended to exemplify my argument directly. Nor is my argument an analysis of them. Rather, I take the stories themselves and participants' own stories within them as theory and treat them on a level with the scholarly theorists I also discuss (as described by Weiss, 2011). This chapter is also less linear and less neatly divided than the other chapters. This is because the material I am working with resists neat categorization and is consistently interconnected. Unlike in the previous chapter where I was able to separate out actor (Inuit), action (strategy) and agency (capacity), these are all happening at once in every story I tell here. If there is a 'flow' to the chapter it is cyclical, or back-and-forth, rather than linear. The different logics of thesis writing and place-based pedagogy sit uneasily together in this chapter. This is not to say that the chapter does not necessarily have a single cumulative effect. Its aim is to show how late liberal logics of action break down, are contested, and are imagined otherwise, at Dechinta Bush University.

## **6.1 Re-configuring spatio-temporalities**

As the Professor on the call pointed out, the marriage of place, pedagogy and politics was what Dechinta was doing already. Dechinta's leaders and publicity materials described Dechinta as "place-based" and "land-based" as well as "decolonizing" and "self-governing" (Dechinta website, 2012). Dechinta's approach was derived from and with local Dene knowledge and this enthusiastic reading of the book affirmed its accuracy and resonance in those communities. In this section I describe how participants in Dechinta Bush University locate their agency in or in relation to 'place'. Without exception, participants across all my interviews were concerned with place and with the land, the North, Nunavut and the NWT. In this chapter, however, when I say 'place' I mean specifically an adapted version of what Bakhtin calls a "chronotope" (Bakhtin, 1982:84).



Bakhtin describes the chronotope as “the intrinsic connectedness of temporal and spatial relationships that are artistically expressed in literature” (Bakhtin, 1982:84). The chronotope, Bakhtin explains, is informed by a “Kantian evaluation of the importance of these forms [space and time] in the cognitive process” (*ibid*). Space and time are primary in the constitution of reality: “the image of man is always intrinsically chronotopic,” and “every entry into the sphere of meaning is accomplished only through the gates of the chronotope” (Bakhtin, 1982:85). Unlike Kant, however, for Bakhtin space and time are not “transcendental” but “forms of the most immediate reality” (*ibid*). Following Einstein’s Theory of Relativity, for Bakhtin time and space are not absolute or universal and they are not something we exist “in” (*ibid*). Instead, time and space are found differently everywhere – they are modes of thinking and organising life, not external to it – and they are entangled and co-constitutive. In Chapter 2 I elaborated Elizabeth Povinelli’s “chronotope of late liberalism” (Povinelli, 2011:31) to show that liberal agency operates around a linear progressive temporality privileged over a stagnant and universal notion of space.

The chronotope of place is therefore more than “simply some material object of profound importance to Indigenous cultures (although it is this too)” (Coulthard, 2010:79-83). Instead, Glen Coulthard argues, land and place “ought to be understood as a field of relationships of things to each other. Place is a way of knowing, experiencing, and relating with the world” (*ibid*). Knowing and learning are “spatial” (Legat, 2012:175) and operate around a “floating temporality” rather than a “linear” settler temporality (Legat, 2012:61). Actors gain authority, through becoming knowledgeable, through and with place. In fact they come into being as actors through the same process – knowing and being are inseparable. This integration of knowledge, place and authority is common to many Indigenous societies and is documented widely (see especially Tim Ingold [2000] and Keith Basso [1996]). In this section I show how the chronotope of place as a “field of relationships” in which spatiality organizes inseparable and contingent temporalities is articulated and practiced in daily life at Dechinta Bush University. I argue that this resists and reworks the colonizing spatio-temporalities of liberalisms and creates other possibilities for action and agency. Enacting the chronotope of place is enacting Indigenous self-determination and decolonization.

Dechinta attributes agency to place and to the land. Its 2012 poster advertisement proclaims: “Meet our most honoured professor...: [picture of the lake and trees at Dechinta] The Land.” Its former Director and founder describes the “land as the primary teacher”: “how does land inform how we act, our ontology, and how we conceive of core values and ethics? ... Land as a teacher and contextualizer for healing, governance and community health” (Director quoted in Luig, 2010:36). The agency of land and place occurs at Dechinta in three ways. First, Dechinta is informed by local realities and needs, as well as being “by Northerners, for Northerners”. I have talked about this aspect of Northern education more generally throughout the thesis. Second, as a “contextualizer”: teaching and learning in and in relation to place expose the contingencies and contradictions of knowledge (particularly governmental knowledge). I discuss this in detail in the next section. Third, place governs. That is, place determines what happens in daily life and place determines who has the authority to act. It is this third way that I focus on here.

Dechinta Initiatives has organized its governance structure and operations around the logics described in the previous paragraph. The organization is advised by a council of local leaders and experts. The most respected instructors were always people who had strong connections to the land and place. These people were primarily but not exclusively elders. There were two resident elders on site. In Dene norms elders would have been camp leaders. It was important that these were not just any elders, but elders from the land on which Dechinta is based. (Dechinta’s leaders claim that this is the case, but I also encountered skepticism around this fact from the program’s critics. Notably it was it was Dechinta’s leaders’ belonging to place that came under attack when critics wanted to attack Dechinta.) Further, if there was a moose sighting or a sunny day, we went hunting. If there was rain, we stayed in and told stories. If it was cold, we collected more firewood. If it was hot, we went swimming. In these ways, we experienced and recognized the land as the primary mode of agency in our daily life. It was not the only mode of agency, however.

Our daily activities were therefore structured so that the Dechinta facilitator (me) and student leaders (rotating) would consult with the elders at least daily to determine our activities for the day. If there was a big activity coming up, we might

consult them the day before to make sure we were prepared. The elders would make these decisions in large part based on weather or other environmental demands. This was not straightforward. The elders were often resistant to scheduling and I had the impression they often gave me a time or activity just to get me off their backs, and when we came to it they would change their mind, forget, or act as if there had never been a plan. In addition, as I describe in a story below, the degree to which elders actually got to lead the course varied, and had to be balanced with the requirements of the University of Alberta. The agency of place was in constant friction and competition with the chronotope of conventional university life, including with pre-made plans, professors' schedules and University of Alberta deadlines.

Nonetheless, the principle of leadership, action and authority being derived from a relationship to place was articulated and aspired to by all Dechinta's participants and, to some degree, was simply made necessary by the social and material conditions of living and teaching in the Arctic. The formal qualifications and job titles which gave authority to instructors in the South became meaningless in the Northern context. I might have been the convener, for example, but when it came to bush tasks I was essentially useless, and bush tasks structured our day both by principle and necessity. Our youngest student of 18 could certainly have made a better call than me on what weather was navigable by boat and how. During our time together she taught me how to strip bark, make teepee floors, chop wood, and paddle, amongst other things. All the students, in fact, knew what needed doing and how, in ways that I could not. This is not to say that a group of young people faced with a large amount of work did not need leadership of some kind, but rather that my formal qualifications and position did not equip me to give it to them. Those qualifications were laughable and we all laughed about them regularly. What the students needed, and would have respected, was someone with the intimate knowledge of the land built through experience and a relationship with that land. That person is an agent in place-based pedagogy. Place itself has a direct impact on the pedagogical relationship.

The material environment also organized everyday life. When the weather is bad (or, as they say there, when "there is weather") people could not fly in or out. As

we approached winter, uncertainty and anxiety increased around whether we would get out and what date we would leave. Some days, instructors did not make it in or lessons could not proceed as planned. I want to discuss Akitsiraq briefly here because I am wary of romanticizing the land and place as ‘wilderness’. Akitsiraq was based in a city of 8,000 and in a college classroom. Its students were not expected to hunt for dinner. They paid for and ate lunch in the well-heated college canteen. Lunch was likely made out of ingredients bought at the local supermarket. Nonetheless, the role of place at Akitsiraq was comparably strong. Students would still follow the weather to a day of hunting or a day at home rather than go to classes. The material environment still made southern academic norms impossible. The very limited and poor internet access challenged pretty much all academic practices. High speed internet only arrived in Nunavut mid-way through the program and remains unreliable. Students could not always use the university interface or download online journals. Staff at Victoria library would make photocopies and send them North – but this was, again, delayed by the postal service (which faces similar challenges) and by weather/flights not being able to land. Southern teaching staff came North for part of or a full semester and as such were in a constant state of adjustment to teaching in this environment. All of this contributed to the different expectations and frustrations and tensions between Northern and Southern students and staff that I described in the previous chapter.

Returning to Dechinta, the following story about the day we set up ‘out-camp’ shows how place-based knowledge happens in practice. The day we set up our camp, group anxiety was high. We were overscheduled and had a number of important tasks which we could not complete all of – including setting up camp. We were all about to leave the comforts of the lodge (running water, privacy, connectivity) to sleep in a teepee together for a week. We travelled a half hour across the lake by motorboat to the camp-site. Our first priorities were to set up shelter and to get firewood. Assembling and erecting the teepee took up most of the afternoon. We had to chop down trees of the appropriate height. We had to remove the branches from those trees and carry them to the teepee site. Then we had to stand the branches up securely against each other. Then we had to get the canvas up around the massive frame in a way that it would protect us from the weather but also allow us to have a

fire or stove in the middle. Then we had to add that fire or stove in a way that would not burn us or the tent down but would not let in rain or snow through either. We were also directed by the Elders to collect tiny spruce branches and weave a floor for the teepee. We then had to go through the same process for the frame tent for the Elders and the frame for the kitchen.

This took us all afternoon. I joked at one point to a student that if we had a pre-made made-in-China tent from Walmart this whole thing would be a lot quicker, less work, less stress and possibly even more effective. We would be able to get on with chopping firewood instead of worrying about being cold and we would be able to take advantage of the moosehide tanner who was visiting back at the Lodge and would only be with us for the day. My own norms valued efficiency, quickness and orderly scheduling! I watched as the students patiently followed the elders' precise instructions as to where to put the teepee poles ("forward... no no to the side..." or "okay we need another tree"). I wondered whether it would be easier if the students could point out when they thought the elders were wrong about how to balance the poles – or even if they had a sense of why they were doing particular things, rather than following blindly. Again, this version of authority, derived from a relationship with the land, jarred with my own. At the end of the day, after several hours of hard work, we had a slightly crooked teepee with a canvas that would not close properly. We had not got any firewood. I felt confused about my responsibility as group leader and facilitator in all this. I thought again about that Walmart tent.

But some other things happened during the course of that day, too: I spent a lot of time collecting spruce branches with our youngest student. We talked about her anxieties about out-camp and she played me hip-hop on her iphone, which I think established some cultural common ground (across the distance, we had both heard the same songs) although also disconnect (I enjoyed them a lot less than she did). We established a rapport which we would carry throughout the semester and a ground on which we could later relate. The students also taught me how to use an axe, which I had never done. They laughed at and congratulated my varied efforts with the axe. This was the beginning of my acquisition of a necessary survival skill. It was also the beginning of my learning from the students which continued throughout the

semester: the activity reversed the conventional pedagogical relationship. Everything that made me authoritative: my job title, my educational qualifications, my role as leader and assessor, they were all meaningless in this context. The students were far more authoritative, and were really my teachers through this experience.

One of the elders explained to me what trees were good for the teepee and which were good for what sorts of fire: I began to distinguish each tree from the next which would enable me to find my way through the bush throughout the semester. Another elder showed me how to lay the spruce floor. I followed her instructions exactly but my floor was not as neat or soft or tidy as hers. I began to be integrated into that system of order and to learn how to interact with it which so far I had only read about in books.

The hard physical work changed our attitudes and interactions as we became tired and frustrated or satisfied and invigorated. Bonds and tensions formed around this work in a pattern that continued throughout the semester: solidarity and cooperation between those working hard and resentment of those perceived to be working less hard, as well as racial and familial tensions around these issues. When we gathered on that spruce floor for our first night in the teepee, looking up at the stars and Northern lights through the opening above us, we recalled those hours and that work. This strengthened our sense of cohesion and solidarity when it came to our nightly ‘circle’, during which we shared our reflections on the day and planned for the next. Of course, the fatigue from the work and anxiety about the days ahead also exacerbated our frustrations with each other and several contributions were short and terse. All of this happened in the hours during which we set up the teepee and might not have happened with a pop-up Walmart tent or some ‘more efficient’ way. And this was only one of many activities that we undertook. (I do not mean to romanticize the teepee. Something similar did in fact happen when students later tried to erect a Walmart tent. That tent was not fit to sleep in, however.) Reflecting on setting up the teepee late that night, I realized that as much of the theory of the land-based and experiential pedagogy I had read, I could only really understand it through or in experience. In the same way, I have been able to communicate it better (if not fully) through a story than an analysis.

The place-based pedagogy was the *process* of setting up out-camp. Teaching, learning and even the emerging community and hierarchy, all happened through the process, which had effects for what we knew and how but also beyond. This was the becoming that Alice Legat was talking about in *Walking the Land*. This way of practicing knowledge governed our activities. In my story, place determined who was authoritative as well as being an agent itself. Place and space organized temporality (more on this below). This is the chronotope of place at work, and it looks strikingly different to the chronotope of late liberalism and the conventional university classroom. This is the way participants theorized their own action and agency: in place, and in the relations between place and the wider late liberal North.

By theorizing and organizing education around the chronotope of place, Dechinta's participants therefore seek to challenge the chronotope of liberal action. Their emphasis on time and space as entangled in place enact what Goeman describes as a "break from the uni-directional, progressive narrative found in the narratives of manifest destiny" (Goeman, 2008:24). Instead, "Indigenous conceptions of land are literally and figuratively the placeholder that moves through time and situates indigenous knowledges. Conceiving of space as a node, rather than a linear time construct marked by supposed shifting ownerships, is a powerful mechanism in resisting imperial geographies that order time and space in hierarchies that erase and bury Indigenous connections to place and anesthetizes settler-colonial histories" (*ibid*). A second effect of place at Dechinta was to expose the contingencies of pedagogic authority and governmental knowledge. I now turn to discuss this in the next section.

## 6.2 Practicing critique

In this section I argue that place-based pedagogy is a critical practice and that place as critique is another mode and effect of action at Dechinta. Before discussing Dechinta specifically I want to stress that by 'critique' I mean an intervention into or reworking of governmental knowledge in practice. By 'governmental knowledge' I mean knowledge practices that themselves govern. This is not an academic critique or criticism. Critique as a practice is more akin to Michel Foucault's "critique," that I

began to describe in Chapter 2 (Foucault, 1997:28-30). To resist the dominant arts of government of the church, Foucault's Reformation Protestants do not reject the god, biblical texts or truth status through which those arts govern. Instead, they re-configure their relations within and against the government of the church to shift authority from the priest to the text and its reader. Similarly, Dechinta reconfigures university pedagogy in the bush. This re-configuration occurs, centrally, around the chronotope of place. As described above, Dechinta attempts to disrupt and rework late liberal everyday spatio-temporalities. Relatedly, as I describe here, relocating governmental and university knowledge to the North exposes its contingencies and contradictions. I have already noted how my own re-location to the Arctic undermined any universal claims of my status as lecturer or instructor. I now describe what teaching law and politics at university level in the Arctic meant for that governmental knowledge and teaching itself more generally.

I am returning briefly to Akitsiraq because Akitsiraq's focus on law illustrates this so starkly. I then look back to Dechinta for further depth and complexity. In the previous chapter I described how the legitimacy of the liberal narrative of leadership and capacity, along with juridical law and the university, gives authority and visibility to Akitsiraq. However, this combination of liberal and alternate ways of knowing and acting has effects beyond this legitimization. For example, one instructor described how property law had to be entirely re-thought to be taught in a Northern setting. Property is arranged, she explained, differently in the North, where there is so much land, little privately owned housing and no tradition amongst Inuit of ownership as exclusivity. Another instructor described his introduction of a classic case about a policy prohibiting the use of vehicles in a park. The idea, he said, was to get students thinking about whether a pram or a bicycle, for example, is a 'vehicle' in the park. But the students did not follow this logic. Instead, they ask asked "what's a pram?" and "what's a park?". They did not understand how this enclosed piece of space might have its own laws. Often, the instructor said, "they were rolling in the isles" – laughing at the absurdities of the taken for granted features of Southern life and law. These contradictions exist in many places but become starkly visible when trying to make Euro-Canadian law make sense in the Arctic setting. The effect of this



re-placing is, therefore, to expose the limits of the Euro-Canadian law in the Northern setting – its contingencies on what is taken as given in the South.

Similarly, Southern instructors had to adjust pedagogically. Most Akitsiraq students are adults ages 30 to 60 and have not attended university or possibly even graduated high school (even though Law is usually a post-graduate degree in Canada). They therefore have no idea of the norms of the classrooms that their instructors are used to. In one of the classes I attended students treated lectures more like conversations and any one of them would interject any time they had something to say or ask. Afterwards the instructor told me that it “kept her on her toes” and that their “questions were not linear,” meaning that they did not make the similar ‘on topic’ associations that Southern students would. She explained to me that in response she had to reconceptualise her lecturing. She drew a point on the board, for me, and then arrows pointing out in all directions. These arrows where were the students’ questions directed the conversation. Her job, she felt, was to draw a circle connecting the heads of all these arrows. In these ways authority was shifted in Nunavut to Inuit and other people from Nunavut, and the spatial representation of law was shifting from linear to circular articulations. This might seem obvious, but contrast this to the homogenous culture of universities world-wide, or the likely experience of a minority Inuit student in one of those universities who would have to adapt to fit.

Returning to Dechinta, contingencies and contradictions in liberal pedagogy, knowledge and government were exposed in their combination with land-based pedagogy. Land-based practices combined with book reading, assignment writing, and accreditation from the University of Alberta. Alice Legat’s (2013) *Walking the Land, Feeding the Fire* was on the reading list. Jeneatte Armstrong’s (1996) *Slash*, with which I opened the introduction to this thesis, was also on the reading list. Book-based knowledge and land-based knowledge have contrasting underlying logics. The effects of this combination of books and the land were two-fold. First, combining the bush and the university exposed the relationships and tensions between these different forms of knowledge and government. Second, they undermined the division of theory and practice, and ontology and epistemology. Both

of these effects, I argue here, are forms of critical practice, exposing the contingency of liberal logics of action and enabling alternate forms to be imagined.

As I said above, students picked up on the phrases “knowing two ways,” and being “strong like two people,” from Alice Legat’s ethnography, *Walking the Land*. These two ways are captured in Dechinta’s title: Dechinta Bush University brings together the way of the bush and the way of the university. I discuss the ambiguity that operated around this “two” in the following section. Here, I talk about the contingencies they exposed and the tensions that they produced in turn. I argue that by drawing attention to contingency and tension “knowing two ways” undermines universal and colonizing knowledge and versions of politics and action. I have already discussed tensions between the North and the university at Akitsiraq (in its admissions process, for example). Here, I show how these same tensions emerged at Dechinta.

Perhaps the most fraught area of activity during the fall semester was the organization of what we were doing at any given moment: how what we were doing was decided, through what logic, what process, and by what authority. Universities are structured around the clock and calendar. Classes begin and end ‘on time’. Deadlines are integral to university life and, to some degree, the functioning of the academic workplace and the rest of the lives of academics. Dates and times are planned in advance and the goal is to adhere to these plans. A specific material environment and space is also conducive to university life: protection of people, books, electronics and even attention or mood from harsh weather, electricity for lighting and computers, internet access, a surface to write or type on, perhaps literal and psychological space to think, to read, to disengage from that immediate material reality through text and theorizing (‘critical distance’). Of course, none of these things is a necessary condition for academic work – one student joked repeatedly that he was going to make a “bush desk” out of the wall of the outhouse we built in the bush. After all, there was no obvious need for walls on our bush outhouse. These conditions definitely make academic work easier and more likely, however. That student never did get the chance to make a bush desk. His time and energy was already overstretched by more immediately urgent bush tasks (like getting firewood).

His workload was exceptionally heavy, as being the only male student meant he was responsible for much of the work that would have traditionally been done by men.

These forms of time and space were present at Dechinta, in scheduling and in the lodge. Delivering programming that is equally rigorous as that in a Southern university is of central concern to Dechinta. Dechinta seeks to demonstrate the legitimacy of the program and ability of its participants. It also aims to equip the students with university skills should they wish to use them – either at a university, or more generally as they embody one of the two ways. Students therefore have to complete and submit assignments 'on time' and for deadlines. There is a written, fixed schedule of these assignment timings throughout the semester. There is also a written, fixed schedule of instructor visits and therefore classes. After all, most incomers are functioning on clock and calendar times in home institutions or workplaces. People must be booked on planes, more food must be bought and flown in to feed more people, and so-on. Institutionally Dechinta must also work with the University of Alberta's deadlines.

The lodge also provided the material and spatial conditions necessary to university-like activity. The Lodge enables participants to scatter, with its multiple rooms, cabins and so-on. It also enables them to continue to connect to the outside, via the internet and, less directly, via people coming and going on the plane. Generator powered heating, electric lighting, shelter and Lodge staff to cook and clean, all enabled us to, more or less, recreate a 'classroom' in the Bush. It did not matter, in this structure, if there was a storm outside (or, conversely, a sunny window of opportunity). We could continue with a class, as scheduled, regardless. Students could fragment into twos or individuals. Two students would often hide in the bathroom. I would have to retrieve them, enacting my teacher authority and status. I would go upstairs alone and make fieldnotes on my laptop, enacting my researcher outsidersness. Students were often late for scheduled activities, keeping the group waiting (we would always wait – unlike in a Southern class). I would hike up and down the rocks gathering the group together, being teacher again, although my authority somewhat undermined by having to hike backwards and forwards up a large hill in order to exercise it. The students could also receive and read articles for

their work (ostensibly – actually the internet was too slow and Dechinta too disorganized in getting these to the students), submit their assignments online, type their assignments on the Dechinta laptop, and post to the Dechinta blog. This way of organizing space is a way of enabling the privileging of clock-time above all else, a material environment created to make distant or irrelevant another material environment, through walls and electricity. It also had the effect of fragmenting the community. This is not a normative statement – fragmenting does not necessarily mean ‘bad,’ and personal space was often quite welcome.

On the other hand, in the bush, when events happen (the organization of time) is determined largely by when environmental opportunities and imperatives present themselves. If there is a big catch of fish, more time is given to gutting and drying. If the weather is bad, activities happen indoors. If it is cold, more wood must be chopped and so-on. These things are impossible to determine in advance and so planning times and dates actively interferes with the order and logic of bush life. That is not to say there is no planning – when going out on the land, for example, one must plan and bring everything needed or risk death. However this is not planning around time. Here space and place order time.

The space of out-camp was more conducive to this way of organizing time and to community cohesion. At out-camp, we were forced into close proximity with each other at all times. There were only really two spaces – inside the tepee or outside, around the kitchen or fire. It was not safe to wander off too far alone - and there was nowhere to go. It was hard to be late for anything – because we were always already there, either free or doing some necessary activity. There was not even really a sense of ‘being late’. You could see, at a glance, roughly where everyone was and what they were doing: it was hard to avoid commitments or be alone in any way. The tasks that we had to complete were not written on a schedule on a wall in another room – they made themselves known to us, through the cold, wet or hunger. It was very difficult to read or to write anything in this context. We hung up our paper schedule on the wall of the kitchen frame – it got rained on and ruined. These two ways of doing time were in almost constant tension throughout the semester: between the weather and the scheduled activities, between the wishes of

the elders and the assignment deadlines, and between the necessities of camp and the instructor flown in to deliver a class. These tensions came to a head in the last few days of the semester which I describe now.

As we neared the end of the semester, we had piled up a number of administrative tasks that, scheduled for earlier in the semester, we had pushed back due to other demands on our time. We had to conduct a paper evaluation of the program, for the University of Alberta, for funders and for Dechinta's own development. Previous semesters had shown that students were unlikely to complete evaluations off-site, so we wanted to avoid them having to do so. We also had to have a discussion about post-site work and deadlines – these had also been pushed back throughout the semester. Again, previous semesters had shown that it was difficult to engage students off-site to complete assignments, so we needed to make our expectations clear and give students the information they needed to complete them. Incomplete assignments meant no university credit for students – undermining a central mission of the program. We had to have a final presentation assessment, as per the syllabus and schedule, and we had to let students prepare for this. At the same time, we needed to take-down out-camp. This was no small task – we had accumulated a large quantity of equipment, from canoes to a well-stocked tent-frame kitchen.

We had also promised to go and visit the cabin of the father of one of the Elders which was further up Blachford Lake. On the way back from that journey, the elders and one student split off to track moose. We had been looking and calling for moose all semester, but had encountered none, so when the elders and student returned to tell us they had spotted and shot a mother and calf, camp was elated (and relieved as we had been anxious during their extended absence). They had butchered the calf, which died by the shore, but the mother ran off into the trees. This meant that a second party had to go out to track and butcher the mother the next day, which was the final full day of the semester. Navigating a large rocky and windy lake, tracking, skinning and butchering a moose are no easy tasks. When I went out with the second party, it took us (five people) over an hour simply to shift the moose into an accessible position. It takes centuries of knowledge generated from the land to

know how to find and follow moose. It takes skills and expertise to know how to butcher it. Removing the hide is a particularly important task, because moose-hide tanning is a process which organizes much of Dene life and governance, and it is easy to cut and ruin the hide with a knife (Irlbacher-Fox, 2009).

The day after we got the moose was the last full day at out-camp and on-site. We had to butcher the moose, pack up camp and do all of our university and administration tasks. The students were divided between wanting to prepare their final assignments and wanting to learn about the moose and to work with the elders. Everyone was divided between the authority of the elders and the university. The Even though the elders said we had to work on the moose, other Dechinta staff felt we had to do the university tasks. Under pressure, we did the university tasks in a somewhat perfunctory way, perhaps losing some of their potential value. Whilst we were doing these tasks, the elder butchered the moose, so the students did not get to learn how. There was some confusion and negotiation as to what was going to happen to the moose. The elders were going to take some; some was going in a community freezer; the students could take some; some parts, probably the hide, had to stay with Dechinta. The camp still needed to be packed up – the semester was scheduled to end and a plane was due to fly into collect us the following day.

These last few days of the semester illustrate some of the tensions that emerged when we tried to combine bush and university ways of life and learning. They also show how, in combining both, we were not able to take either for granted. We were able to see the forms of life which each enabled. We were *not* able to choose freely or strategically (as participants suggested they might be in the final section of Chapter 5). We found ourselves feeling the force and weight of university logics and spatio-temporalities – even if we might have wished otherwise. Nonetheless, because they were operating in the bush, we were not determined by these logics blindly or absolutely. In this “complex interplay between what replicates the same process and what transforms it,” (Foucault, 1997:58), Dechinta created the possibility and space for critical reflexivity around its participants own agency.

I now end this section by discussing a further critical feature and effect of Dechinta: the collapse of distinctions between theory and practice, ontology and

epistemology. Dechinta's 2010 evaluation report makes these effects its explicit aims (Luig, 2009). This collapse is evident throughout this whole chapter. In the story I told above, Dene forms of knowledge are articulated between the elders who Alice Legatt worked with, her book *Walking the Land*, and the Dene Dechinta students – as well as, of course, the thesis you are reading right now. Frequently I would encounter the words or actions of instructors and experts in the field, only then to go to their books for some more legitimate reference. I experienced this entanglement particularly acutely in my ongoing relationships with grant leaders and instructors Glen Coulthard and Stephanie Irlbacher-Fox. These scholars were already drawing on community experiences and now on Dechinta itself in their work (in fact we were all engaged in a research project on/with Dechinta at the time). Similarly, I would sit and read books theorizing land-based learning while also doing land-based learning itself. Sometimes I would help the students engage with those books.

My description of place-based pedagogy here is of a messy, everyday entanglement of books, readers, writers, knowers and known. My point (and Dechinta's participants point) is to show that subject and object, theory and practice and even epistemology and ontology cannot be neatly separated out. This contrasts directly with autological action, in which actor (knower), action (knowing) and outcome (knowledge) are separable and organized in linear progressive time. In my description so far, they are not separable in this way. Rather, they are all happening simultaneously and are organized spatially. This is part of what has made the current chapter so difficult to separate. This is not a completely new revelation. When, for example, Judith Butler says that discourse "enacts or produces that which it names" she is arguing that knower, knowledge and known are not in fact separable (Butler, 1993:13). The pedagogy of place is much more than an analysis, however. The pedagogy of place enacts this collapse in daily life as well as enacting something else – experience and place – in its stead.

This section has covered contingencies, contradictions and the collapse of multiple divisions. This far-reaching selection of accounts contributes to a larger picture in which place-based pedagogy is a critical practice. Much like that of Foucault's protestants, they do not reject governing knowledge (the university)

outright, but rather reconfigure it (with place) in order to rework it. Reworking late liberal state politics means exposing their contingencies and contradictions, as well as reaching for ways in which political action and agency might be imagined otherwise. In this case, that ‘otherwise’ involves privileging space, land and place, and entangling theory and practice, knower and known, actor and action through the process of place-based pedagogy. I now turn to describe how ambiguity and indeterminacy enabled this critical practice at both Dechinta and Akitsiraq and what this meant for my own attempt to locate post-liberal forms of agency.

### **6.3 Acting ambivalently and indeterminately**

*The moral asymmetries across which ethnography works and the discursive complexity within which it works make any attempt to portray it as anything more than the representation of one sort of life in the categories of another impossible to defend.*

(Geertz, 1988:144)

Is it even possible to talk about post-liberal or place-based forms of agency from my own location in the liberal university? Do Dechinta’s participants’ efforts at enacting alternatives ‘count’ or are they always assimilated? This final section deals with the qualities and logics of action at work at Dechinta. First, I talk about the difficulties of trying to imagine a post-liberal form of agency from my own location in higher education. Similarly, I discuss some of the difficulties faced by participants in doing the same thing while working in partnership with southern universities. I then move on to describe the roles of ambiguity and ambivalence at Dechinta and in Northern higher education more broadly. I argue that these distinctly unliberal forms of action enabled participants to navigate some of the tensions I have described here.

This chapter describes efforts at articulating forms of political agency and action differently from the late liberal context of the Canadian North. Sometimes these forms feel fleeting or intangible. This results both from liberalism’s prevalence, and also from the contradictions and frustrations of reaching for non-liberal forms of agency from my own liberal academic contexts using the form of a thesis. I shared



this problem in common with the research participants, and discuss at length in the conclusion. One of its implications is that, as Elizabeth Povinelli argues, when we are looking for things that are otherwise or alternate to late liberalism, those things might be excluded from liberal terms of success and existence – the same terms that regulate intelligibility in academia (Povinelli, 2011:31-32). One of the terms Povinelli is particularly concerned with is the demand for temporal endurance – the idea that if it ends, it has failed. If we conceive of the relations of modes of agency as relational, however, the slippage of one into the next does not signal a failure to exist, but a necessity of existence, and sometimes a refusal to exist in the dominant terms. Again, this requirement for recognition aligns with the chronotope of late liberalism.

I have told stories in this chapter in order to capture this sense or feel of the otherwise where simple descriptions or statements would not. I have also told stories because stories can maintain multiple and sometimes conflicting truths and logics. For example, in the stories above, both juridical and place-based versions of reality, including agents and actors, are equally ‘true’ and ‘real’. Both are in operation, with their own (often contradictory and incommensurable) limits, possibilities and effects, in everyday life at Dechinta. This is characteristic of the project, which brings together forms of agency which are ontologically mutually exclusive. Dechinta is made up of different forms of reality. These forms or realities nonetheless exist together and in relation to each other in the project. While the “two ways” were centred around objects they were not yet fully articulated. That is, nobody really knew what a ‘bush university’ or ‘Inuit lawyer’ was or might be. The continued operations of Dechinta, then, were made possible and practiced by Dechinta’s participants as ambivalence, ambiguity, uncertainty, indeterminacy, impossibility, absurdity and paradox. Ambivalent and uncertain action contrasts with the centrality of strategy and instrumentality to liberal action I described in the previous chapter. The various components of indeterminate or ambivalent action are not necessarily separable, knowable or distributed in linear time.

In the first instance, and in a very practical way, a degree of ambiguity and ambivalence enables components of action, and actors themselves, to come together

when more clarity and certainty would result in refusal or conflict. For example, the Akitsiraq Law School Society, the Government of Nunavut and the Government of Canada all had very different hopes and incentives for “making Inuit lawyers”, as well as different ideas about what this actually meant (see Chapter 5). A certain level of ambiguity therefore allowed them all to work together on the project. The ambiguity of ‘North’ and its relation to Indigeneity functions similarly. In a conservative reading of this ambiguity Northern education projects are liberal political coalitions, like in issue-based politics, and function by allowing actors with otherwise competing aims to come together around a common cause. These coalitions involve strategic, autonomous, goal-oriented individuals. Or, recognizing the power differential between Indigeneity and the Canadian state, their participants could be understood as “tempered radicals”: “individuals who identify with and are committed to their organizations and also to a cause, community or ideology that is fundamentally different, from and possibly at odds with the dominant culture of those organizations” (Meyerson and Scully, 1995:586). They do so, Meyerson and Scully argue, through a type of “ambivalence” which functions not as a weakness or lack, but as a strength and possibility. Meyerson and Scully recognize the risks of assimilation and exclusion, and as such their account gets closer to what is happening in Northern education. Like the liberal coalition, however, tempered radical actors are once again strategic individuals and their agency and action look a lot like the latently liberal form I described in the final section of the previous chapter.

What I want to stress here instead is the ontological heterogeneity of Northern education and of Dechinta Bush University especially. At Dechinta different types of actor (the bush and the professor), existing in different modes of reality and social order (place and the institution), as well as different modes of knowing – i.e. different units of reality and components of agency – are coming together in action, with transformative possibilities and effects (described below). This is not a coalition in the liberal sense because its parts – the parts whose relationships matter - are not subsumed within a single, liberal order. Nor is it merely tempered radicalism (although it is partly that) because, again, its parts are not only strategic, autological and individual actors. It is not even easily articulated within a more post-structuralist approach: Butler’s “subversive drag,” for example, is

ambivalent and ambiguous, but it is also neatly reduced to discourse and performativity as the stuff of reality. Instead, at Dechinta, agency occurs at a nexus of highly diverse elements, operating within competing logics, but nonetheless in relation to each other. Ambiguity and ambivalence are central to making this possible.

This ambivalence and ambiguity also held together two different modes of action and agency – one embodied in the settler state and the other in the Indigenous philosophy described in this chapter. Once again, had their relationship been more fully articulated or interrogated, they might not have held together: in their most fully articulated and bounded forms, as in the resurgence paradigm of decolonization (see Chapter 3), the two are mutually exclusive (Alfred, 2005). But participants put aside questions of their precise relationship and its possibilities, in favour of practicing and enacting both. This was both facilitated by and resulted in recurrent ambiguity and an absence of clarification and certainty. It was also facilitated by and resulted in ambivalence and positioning on both or neither side of the debate. In these ways it was indeterminate with no defined or known goal or outcome of activities. It was also often contradictory and multiple, involving variety of sometimes competing relationships between liberal and non-liberal forms of life and action and their own variations. When I first began the research, I asked the organizers of the projects a lot of questions about the relationship of Indigenous and juridical legal or university knowledge, but they rarely had an answer for me. In a conversation with an Akitsiraq leader, I asked whether and how “students discussed the relationship between Inuit and Canadian law?” She replied “I suppose so – that sort of thing must have gone on in the corridors”, but it was not a formal part of the program. She expressed bafflement and scepticism that I was looking for any fixed version of this relationship. The Law School Society didn’t provide one. It assumed the possibility and left open a lot of ambiguity and uncertainty in order simply to practice both Inuit and juridical law.

Dechinta was more explicit about the experimental dimension of its activities, articulating itself as a formal research project into the possibilities for synthesizing bush and university pedagogy. On-site, I also experienced a very immediate sense of

its creators having simply thrown together a bunch of elements in the bush to see how they worked themselves out. I myself was one of these elements: not fully prepared for or understanding of bush life, for example, but having to navigate it in my position as facilitator nonetheless. Part of this was to do with limited resources – it was not possible to streamline or optimize lots of elements in advance. But part of it was also due to its principles of self-governance of the community and spontaneous interactions with the land: part of the point of the project was that it could not all be worked out in advance. And, of course, part of it was due to its participants having different ideas about what it is for. Once again, then, despite an analysis of the contradictions between bush and university knowledge being part of the Dechinta curriculum, the project assumed it was possible to practice them both at once, and went on to do so – leaving the question of whether and how they might co-exist open, and posed in multiple different ways. In this way Dechinta, like Akitsirag, maintained contradiction, paradox and even impossibility (the joining of the opposites of bush and university, Inuit and lawyer), in practice through ambiguity, ambivalence and indeterminacy.

The effects of this are multiple. This ambiguity enables Dechinta's very existence in the ways I describe above. It also exposes the fundamental contradictions and violence in the conditions of that existence, as well as potentially reworking some of the objects around which ambiguity is maintained. By insisting that the liberal narrative is related to Indigenous alternatives, the projects also expose some of the specific ways in which it operates. It exposes not only liberalism's contingencies, as I described in the last section, but often also its violence and absurdities. I described above how at Akitsirag instructors were similarly forced to make Southern and settler law make sense in relation to Indigenous law or the Northern context. Sometimes this meant showing its role in colonization (and the abuse, suicide and poverty present in the daily lives of students), or admitting it does not make sense at all and falls short of fulfilling its own logics.

Another effect of illuminating the differences between European private property and Indigenous stewardship was to show the colonizing relationship between these two ways of thinking about relationships with land. In Inuit law there

is no tradition of private property or ownership as exclusivity. The land cannot be owned like a 'resource'. People are stewards, not owners, and the land has its own agency and authority. Similarly, at Dechinta, we discussed the Dene concept of 'de' – land which both governs and includes people. People are self-consciously co-constituted with land (as Legat describes in the first section of this chapter). These two different accounts of relations to land, embodied in two forms of law, enact two different forms of subjectivity and agency. In juridical law, the individual, autonomous and economic subject is able to own and to control land as property. In both Inuit and Dene law, there is no individual separable from the land – subjectivity is relational – and the land itself has agency. This exposes the contingency of settler forms of government. But it also begins to expose their violence: how these ideas of land are interwoven with settler colonialism and how, as I described in the previous chapter, engaging or being forced to engage with land in this way follows the logic of assimilation and elimination (as Wolfe describes in the previous chapter).

In all these ways, indeterminacy is integral to what is happening in Northern education – both in terms of its effects, and because indeterminate action is at odds with the liberal narrative of agency. This action is not only that it is potentially disruptive and unsettling to liberal logics of agency, and does not only enable anti-colonial projects, but it itself refuses liberal logics of action: there is no deliberate intention behind it, no goals, no strategic or instrumental action, and actors which are at least as significant as human individuals. Of course, there are liberal logics and effects of ambiguity too, as I described with reference to coalition and issue-based politics above. But these only apply when the components of action are liberal subjects. The ontological heterogeneity of Dechinta includes more than these. Perhaps more significantly, this non-deliberate form of action, with no intentional subject, or subjects without fully articulated intentions, might be accused of not looking very agentic at all. Indeed, as Povinelli argues, I cannot, from academia or late liberalism more generally, imagine fully a version of agency which does not conform somehow to liberal standards of intelligibility.

## Conclusion

Place, critique and ambiguity do not form a single coherent alternate way of imagining or practicing political action. Neither, however, are these three ways of thinking about action simply oppositional resistance to liberal narratives. Rather, as I have shown, they rework and combine to destabilize and decentre liberal forms of agency and to enact and enable other forms of action and agent. Place as agency determines daily life, enables human actors, and is a “field of relations,” in which life is ordered and occurs (Coulthard, 2010). The practice of critique was the way actors intervened in governmental knowledge, exposed its contingencies, and attempted to imagine governing otherwise. Dechinta is enabled by and produces a number of ambiguities, ambivalences and uncertainties. These three aspects of action at Dechinta are not distinct. They were entangled and happen simultaneously in moments like reading *Walking the Land* or setting up out-camp. This entanglement and interconnectedness was a consistent feature of life at Dechinta and happened through knowledge practices specifically. The accounts of knowledge, spatio-temporality and ontology in this chapter are the material I engage in Chapter 7 in which I further theorize the possibilities for post-liberal agency.

Read with my discussion of late and latent liberalism in the previous chapter, these accounts also illuminate the central image and argument of this thesis: the multiplicity and dynamic interrelation of different forms of agency. That is, not only are the efforts at articulating non-liberal forms of agency in this chapter all interconnected with each other, they also draw on and spill back into the liberal forms in the last chapter. It is not simply that a practice looks liberal from one angle and otherwise from another (which it does), or that an effort fails and becomes assimilated or vice versa (which they do), but that they also enabled and facilitate the existence of each other. In the next chapter, I tease these links out further and discuss their implications for the problem of liberal agency and the critical and queer literatures on agency described in Chapter 2.

## 7. Conclusion

One of the most challenging aspects of completing a PhD was, for me, the seemingly mundane task of organizing the thesis into a series of discrete and cumulative sections. As hard as I tried I could not make any one version of political agency belong fully or stay put under any single subheading. I would begin by following some thread or moment happening between participants that seemed straightforwardly anti-liberal, only to find it slipped back into liberal logics once again, or vice versa. When I tried to categorize accounts of agency, none would fit neatly or stay put in any box. Each version of agency kept spilling over the edge or leading somewhere else. In fact any individual practice or understanding of political action was only made meaningful through its relations with other narratives. I could not therefore tell stories only about post-liberal agency. I had to tell them about liberal agency too, in order to show their meanings. At the same time I was also wary of binaries which meant I did not want to reduce my account to ‘liberal’ and ‘non-liberal’. Yet I found participants themselves returned to binaries, if always in the ambiguous and shifting way I described in Chapter 6. I came to understand these challenges as being produced by the multiplicity, relationality and dynamism of the forms of agency at work in the field, and of the persistence but also failure of thinking about agency through either/or questions.

In this final chapter I turn to discuss this multiplicity, relationality and dynamism, with a particular focus on how it works on ontological and spatio-temporal levels. I do this in the first two sections with reference to my discussion so far and to Northern educators and decolonizing action specifically. Both these sections focus on the relations between Chapters 4, 5 and 6 and between the forms of agency discussed within them. The structure of Chapters 5 and 6 in particular mirror the significance yet ultimate failure of the binary of liberal and post-liberal agency. Chapter 5 included accounts of agency aligned with late liberalism, while Chapter 6 contained accounts which attempted to or did disrupt liberal and state logics. At the same time, almost every instance of political action I described in either chapter

could be seen to connect with another instance, often in the other chapter. The chapters take on a new meaning when taken together.

In the first section of this chapter, I argue that these connections show the multiple, relational modes of agency at work in the daily lives of participants in Northern education. This contrasts with the shape of the decolonization debate which presents engaging the late liberal state as an either/or option. Instead, Northern educators recognize and practice a range of different forms of action simultaneously. This multiplicity of modes of action creates two levels on which agency can be located: within any given version, and between multiple versions. It is this latter, interstitial location of agency that I am concerned with here. All this means, I suggest, that we should ask questions about ‘how’ different forms of political action relate at least as often as we ask ‘which’ are the most effective. This applies to education, to decolonization and to politics more generally.

In the second section of the chapter I argue that ontology is one aspect of this ‘how’. Ontology is, I argue, one way in which agency, multiplicity and relationality occur in the context of Northern education. I describe the ontologies of agency at work in the chronotopes of late liberalism and of place. I identify interrelations and struggles between these multiple ontologies in this thesis. As I showed in Chapter 6, ontology is a primary concern of participants. In Northern education, struggles occurred not simply or even primarily over big ideas like ‘liberalism’ and ‘the state’, but more often over the minutiae of ontology and its practice in daily life. Most of the assertions of agency I encountered in my fieldwork, regardless of whether they were liberal or otherwise, took the form of assertions and enactments of particular ontologies. I have also chosen this ontological focus because, I argue, it points to the significance of ontology in any form of political agency. It also points to the potential of ontology and spatio-temporality for reworking the meaning and possibility of political action. More specifically I argue that decolonizing political agency and action must involve paying attention to liberalisms’ colonizing ontology and spatio-temporality.

In the third section I turn to the implications of this discussion for theorizing post-liberal agency more generally. I return to the dilemmas and paradoxes for



imagining post-liberal agency with which I opened this thesis. How to act against, on or in-spite of the terms for agency itself? Anti-colonial Northern educational actors point, I argue, to concrete ways of doing just this. One aspect of this is recognition that liberal logics of political agency are often latent in unexpected ways, but that they can also be inhabited creatively and heterogeneously. Another aspect is, crucially, a way of taking paradoxes seriously while not getting trapped by their limits and logics – of working from within and reworking Butler’s “paradox of subjectivation” (Butler, 1993:15). Conceiving of political agency multiply, relationally, ontologically and spatio-temporally offers, I argue, one of navigating and reworking the dilemmas that constitute late liberalism.

## **7.1 Multiple interrelated forms of action**

In 1990, Mohawk in Oka, Quebec, occupied a sacred burial ground in protest against its upcoming development into a golf-course. The provincial police attacked the barricade with truncheons, tear gas, flash bang grenades and a bulldozer. Both sides fired guns, and a police officer was shot and killed. The national media paid close attention, focussing on the warrior-like images of Mohawk wearing bandanas to hide their faces and carrying guns. At the opposite end of Canada and throughout the rest of the 1990s negotiations between Inuit and the federal government intensified resulting in the signing of the Nunavut Land Claim Agreement in 1999. Mohawk scholar Taiaiake Alfred who was a band council member in Oka at the time of the conflict has since denounced the Nunavut Land Claim Agreement as the pinnacle of colonial assimilation (Alfred, 2005:27). In our conversations, Inuit in Nunavut almost uniformly rejected the violent and confrontational strategies of other Indigenous peoples. Inuit repeatedly cited their payment of taxes as evidence of Inuit inclusion and Canadianness. Implicit in this assertion is a reference to the outsidership of Status Indians, including Mohawk, who are exempt from taxes.

Oka is an example of political action against the late liberal state and its methods. The Nunavut Land Claim is a case of political action within the late liberal logics of decolonization. Participants in each one denounce participants in the other. What is the relationship between these two seemingly opposed approaches to

Indigenous politics? In Chapter 4 I showed how the decolonization debate articulates political action as an either/or problem. To re-cap, the politics of decolonization are organized into two paradigms: the ‘liberal’ or ‘constitutional’ and the ‘resurgence’ paradigms. These are what James Tully describes as two “options” for “arts of resistance and freedom” (Tully, 2000:42). The former, seeking intelligibility, is within the dominant “techniques of government”, “the structure of domination as a whole,” or the “dominant language of western political thought” (*ibid*). The latter, seeking to evade assimilation, is “against the structure of domination as a whole.” The dominant language and structure Tully is talking about here is the late liberal settler state. I showed how these ways of thinking about decolonizing politics are grounded in two accounts of power which produced two histories of the same events. One of these accounts is told in liberal terms, one critical of those terms. I argued that a discussion of political agency was necessary in relation to this debate. Taken as a whole, the debate seemingly precludes anti-colonial agency because actors are faced by erasure on both sides. This left open the question of what sort of agency was possible in the face of something that insisted on setting the terms for agency itself. I argued that the debate turned on a number of implicit ideas about agency and on its associated stakes for actors and action. I showed how making agency central and explicit in that debate made visible its contingencies and stakes in a way that took seriously but also started to undo the either/or impasse at which it had arrived.

In the rest of the thesis I continued to locate actors in relation to the debate and to show how those actors themselves repeated, reworked or refused its terms. Actors were aware of and participants in this debate. The education projects I worked with are saturated with the decolonization literature and with the people and theories within it – the university-building projects are entangled with and woven through that debate. Chapter 5 (and the Akitsirag Law School) aligned more closely with the constitutional and late liberal narrative of decolonization; Chapter 6 (and Dechinta Bush University) with the resurgence paradigm. John Borrows, the figurehead of decolonization within Canadian law, is a returning instructor at, and proponent of, Akitsirag. Glen Coulthard, a parallel leader in the resurgence paradigm, is an instructor and creator of Dechinta. Students at each project read the scholarship from

each school of thought, and the theory of action from each informs the projects as actions in themselves. They are also cognisant of the risks in both directions.

I showed throughout how anti-colonial educational actors did not assume they have to choose one or the other type of action. Actors in Northern education did not subscribe fully to one form of agency or another. Even though Dechinta and Akitsiraq are both weighted towards one or the other, participants actually practice and relate both at once – as well as a range of practices within each. They did not assume that they are mutually exclusive. They thought nothing of following, simultaneously, two completely contradictory logics of decolonization. They even took it for granted that this would be the case. Northern educators did not see their own agency as either liberal or otherwise, therefore, but rather located their agency in the interstices of these different forms of politics.

In the same way that the different ways of understanding action do both compete with and enable each other, Dechinta and Akitsiraq are linked as projects. Participants in each project support and respect each other, and generally perceive each other to be allies in the same despite their alignments with opposing theories of decolonization. There are tensions between Dechinta and Akitsiraq. Akitsiraq's participants, for example, responded with resistance to my reports that Dechinta's participants employed a warrior-like language of the resurgence paradigm. This also echoes some broader east/west, Inuit/Dene tensions that were visible in both projects, as I described in the introduction. But there are also strong interpersonal and institutional connections between Dechinta and Akitsiraq. They are both involved in the campaign for a Northern University, and in a particular section of this which opposes a college-led version of this University. They promote each other on social media and by word of mouth. A senior Akitsiraq staff member is mentor to several Dechinta staff and students. I got my job with Dechinta with the support of an Akitsiraq Law School Society member speaking to a Dechinta leader. Multiple modes of anti-colonial action are therefore co-existent and co-constitutive not only in the daily lives of individuals, groups and projects but also in institutional arrangements.

To take one example of the interconnectivity of forms of action, in the hands of different participants and at different moments, “making Inuit lawyers” (Akitsiraq Law School Society *et al*, 2007) variously meant: subverting the power of juridical law to give status to non-liberal Inuit ways of being; affirming the authority of law as action and lawyer as actor; undermining the universality of law and its exclusion of Indigenous peoples by creating an impossible contradiction; and articulating action strategically again in the very idea of ‘subversion’. As a practice and concept, making Inuit lawyers was neither a straightforwardly liberal nor anti-liberal understanding of action. It was both, depending on the exact moment and context, but each moment and context and therefore meaning was tied to the another, weaving back and forth between ‘liberal’ and ‘non-liberal’, but also between different versions of agency within them. Strategy, for example, was an especially recurrent conduit. This example illustrates the dynamism and multiplicity of forms of agency at work in the field. The example also illustrates a recurrent theme of the thesis: the creative ways in which liberal logics of action are inhabited (Mahmood, 2012) and the ways those logics themselves adapt locally (Povinelli, 2011) [more on this below].

My account here clearly contrasts with the either/or binary of the decolonization debate. Participants’ enactments and relation of multiple forms of political agency reframe questions about modes of political action more generally. At the heart of the decolonization debate is a ‘which’ question: which form of action can fulfill the project and ethics of decolonization? Northern educators show, however, that multiple forms of political agency can and do co-exist, co-constitute and interrelate. We should therefore also, I argue, be asking ‘how’. How, for example, do the shooting at Oka and the signing of the world’s largest land claim agreement in Nunavut relate as two very different moments of Indigenous relations with the late liberal settler state? Reframing the problem of decolonization in this way furthers our understanding of it and points to theoretical and substantive directions for future research.

My aim is not to say that multiplicity is the ‘right’ or only approach to decolonization. As I said in Chapter 4, there is also value in the binary approach, particularly in its certainty and lines of accountability. As I have said throughout, agency operates differently everywhere and it is impossible to transplant any single account from one context to the next. Nonetheless I do see the ways in which I have reframed the problem in this chapter as generating clear lines of enquiry (but not answers) for those concerned with decolonization and settler-colonialism more generally. Anti-colonial scholars and activists may, as I have here, learn more about their own specific contexts by recognizing the possibility of multiplicity and asking ‘how’ questions as well as ‘which’ questions. Those scholars and activists might also find concrete strategies as well as understanding in relations between forms of political action.

The multiple relational forms of agency at work in the Canadian North do more than simply enable each other (although this enabling is important). Participants also, I have shown, located their own agency in between forms – in the in-betweens and relations themselves. I have found Margot Weiss’s analogy of “circuits” of power to be helpful in articulating the implications of this interstitial location of agency (Weiss, 2011:22). Circuitousness is just one of many analogies that could capture the ways in which agency works in the context. I am using it to draw out the significance of the dynamic relationality I encountered, not to theorize that relationality as always circuitous. What I find particularly resonant in Weiss’s account is the emphasis she places on the productive and effective potential of the circuit itself, not just of its parts. Weiss uses circuits to conceptualize the relationship between the practices of BDSM and neoliberalism. She documents the ways in which BDSM practices and neoliberalism are “imagined as isolated and opposed,” whereas in fact they are connected by the same circuits of “affect and effect” and power (Weiss, 2011:7, 22). Those connections have “productivity,” “functionality” and “effects” in themselves (Weiss, 2011:7). The circuits are agential. Weiss uses the circuit to relate big and small as co-constituted (“capitalism and performance,” “public and private,” or as “socioeconomic and subjective,” neoliberalism and

BDSM [*ibid*]), which could certainly stand in for the relationship of Northern education and the late liberal settler state.

What I want to do here, however, is extend the circuit analogy to describe the relationships between different sorts of action and different conceptions of agency that I encountered in my fieldwork. Forms of political agency associated with the resurgence and constitutional paradigms are certainly “imagined as isolated and opposed” (*ibid*). Agency flows between those forms of anti-colonial political action, and their relationships are functional and effective. Their relations themselves are, I suggest, agential. This occurs in the same way the story I have told travels between chapters 5 and 6 – and its meaning and implications are derived from the relations of both. For example, a form of agency is articulated within the organization of daily time and space around the chronotope of place, but anti-colonial action happens between this and the spatio-temporalities of the university, as do disruptive effects for governmental knowledge in making it appear contingent and malleable (I described all this in Chapter 6).

There are two levels of thinking about agency in this account. There is a version of agency both within any given articulation, and also between articulations. Even then, ‘within’ is not really possible: after all, the possibility of organizing a project around place is facilitated by the resources and legitimacy of the state and university, while (on a much bigger scale) those things were themselves originally conceived in opposition to Indigeneity, and so-on. As Anne-Marie Mol says, “this multiplicity does not come in the form of pluralism. It is not as if there were separate entities each standing apart in a homogeneous field” (Mol, 2002:85). Rather, the story I have told in this thesis shows the co-constitution of what Mol calls ‘entities’ (forms of agency) and their concurrence with what she calls the ‘field’ (late liberalism). Unlike the professionals who appear in Mol’s research, participants in the current project self-consciously enact these relations and concurrence.

My point here is not simply to reiterate that there were multiple hard to pin down versions of agency at work or liberal and alternative accounts of agency are

messy and heterogeneous. Nor is my point to create a theory of agency as circuitous, although this might prove a fruitful future line of thought. Rather, my point is that even between seemingly opposed and competing accounts of agency, there are often relations. These relations are often mutually enabling. Chapters 5 and 6 therefore contain a variety of ways in which agency might be called ‘liberal’ or ‘non-liberal’. Each way is followed by some different depth or limit, making both chapters fragmented and incomplete. Read together, however, those depths, limits and incongruities turn out to be moments at which liberal or non-liberal forms of agency interact. In those moments some practice or understanding is transformed, enables another practice, or breaks down into the other way. More than this, however, participants located their agency in these interconnections themselves. The relationality of different forms of agency does more than simply enable those different forms. The relations themselves might also be sites or moments of agency. I now turn to examine how this relationality and multiplicity occurs on the levels of ontology and spatio-temporality.

## 7.2 Ontologies of agency

*Anthropology is the science of the ontological self-determination of the world's peoples... [anthropology's mission is] the permanent decolonization of thought*

(de Castro, 2003)

In describing “ontological self-determination” Viveiros de Castro (2003) recognizes that a people’s voice, reality and agency are in part enacted (or erased) along with their specific ontology. To some degree my methods and approach align with this ‘ontological turn’ in anthropology. Certainly, like de Castro, I encountered the co-existence of multiple ontologies and their attendant realities, and I did so ethnographically. Like de Castro, I also recognize the politics of *whose* ontology is at work at any given moment. The participants in Northern education are striving for something that could be called “ontological self-determination” (*ibid*). In this section

of the thesis, however, I do more than politicize ontology. I also do the reverse and argue that the different forms of political action at work in Northern education each have their own ontology. I argue that the relations between forms of agency that I have described thus far often occur on the level of ontology and they occur in spatio-temporalities in particular. In making these arguments I aim to illuminate the ontological contours of a possible post-liberal agency, as well as the potential of ontology for post-liberal forms of action.

In chapters 5 and 6 I identified several moments when Northern education actors deliberately assert one ontology over another ontology, as well as more moments when multiple ontologies occur together in daily life at Dechinta and Akitsiraq. An ontology is a version of what is or what can be real – a version of what reality is made up of. Ontology is therefore about power in the sense that it is conditions of possibility for existence of certain realities including agents and agencies. For example, in Chapter 6 I described how at out-camp elders and instructors asserted reflexively a relational place-based ontology over a liberal institutional university one, and how the university one would intrude or clash especially in times of time-pressure. In Chapter 5 I described how in the Akitsiraq classroom, instructors attempted to impose a rationalist liberal ontology and failed in the face of students saturated in an entirely different one – *or* attempted to value a more holistic, intuitive, creative one only to be told by students that they want “the real stuff”. These types of assertion and struggles were central and recurrent aspect of what individual actors were doing at any given moment and in each of the various ways they conceptualize their educational and political projects.

A product (and perhaps condition) of these activities across the stories I have told is therefore ontological heterogeneity. Even within a single project or a single actor’s actions, multiple ontologies (aligned with multiple forms of agency, see below) were both recognized and operating in practice along with attendant effects, limits and possibilities. This is true also of the broader fields of Northern education and Indigenous politics, which cobble together an uncomfortable and contradictory range of ontologies. Sometimes, as in policies around cultural relevance, state actors make attempts to make this difference commensurable as ‘culture’. In everyday life,



however, I found that people most often bring together a variety of different realities and ways of conceiving of reality.

This ontological heterogeneity in itself is interesting and striking in an anthropological sense, but I am concerned primarily in the specificity of relations within it, its cumulative effects, and its meanings for the problem of agency in late liberalism. A pluralistic or cosmopolitan reading might say that this is multiculturalism in action – but clearly these ontologies are not equally related nor entirely divisible. As I showed in Chapter 3, participants might claim and aim to be asserting a place-based or Indigenous version of reality, but the institution and ontology of the university kept reworking that assertion into its terms. Here we see the force of liberalism and its implications for agency on an ontological level. We also see liberalisms co-existence and interactions with alternate ontologies (I do not mean to imply external or separable by ‘alternate’ – alternate is more a way that they are imagined). I would also describe this thesis as ‘ontologically heterogeneous’ in that I have followed research participants in bringing all sorts of bits and pieces of different realities together to tell a story, or multiple stories.

Returning to the logics and practices of agency through the lens of ontology, more features of the struggles in Northern education become visible. As I described in Chapter 2, agency in late liberalism is autological. Autological action involves an autonomous actor who is separate from and prior to a deliberate action which is oriented to a future goal or outcome. In autological action, reality is organized along a linear progressive temporality with parts that are fixed and universal. This also has implications for epistemology, or how that reality can be known (important in a teaching and research context). Liberal logics suggests that given actors are fixed and pre-discursive, that they can know and be known objectively, and that knowledge itself can also be fixed and held like an object.

This late liberal ontology was especially visible in Chapter 5, in which I described how participants in the Akitsiraq Law School attempted to capture and redeploy tools of the settler state to their own ends of decolonization and self-determination – by building capacity, making Inuit lawyers, and seeking legitimacy.

I described how this was understood and practiced, variously: as subverting state resources and as reworking a discursive entity, as well as simply empowering Indigenous and Northern people with skills and expertise. Participants subverted state and university funding and legitimacy by securing it in its own terms and then using it to underpin and enable Indigenous knowledge and wellbeing. They drew on constitutional decolonizing theory – which recognizes the state as a fluid and discursive entity – to rework the state from within and to write Indigenous voices into its constitution.

I absolutely do not want to undermine the political potential or ethics (or any kind of ‘rightness’) of this way of conceiving of political agency and action. Informed by constitutional scholars and actors, it was often theoretically grounded and nuanced. It often refused an essential account of either Indigenous authenticity or the state: both were understood as able to be changed and potentially made commensurable. And it was consistently strategic and instrumental, rarely buying fully into the late liberal logics it engaged. As Saba Mahmood (2012) argues, recognizing the complexity of liberalisms in this way is one of the effects of centering agency rather than politics or resistance. Another effect is my creation of an image of actors who engage the dominant terms of action intentionally and who are not passive victims of those terms. I do, however, want to show that underlying this complexity and the intentionality of actors is a persistently liberal ontology of agency: that the very idea that ‘tools’ are ‘redeployed’ to Indigenous ‘ends’, draws on and enacts a particular form of reality. Of course, it was not reducible to these logics: in their specific empirical contexts and practices capacity-building, lawyer-making and legitimacy-seeking had effects and logics that went beyond its reproduction. But the ontology of late liberal agency was nonetheless persistent throughout – itself a remarkably adaptive logic, reconstituted repeatedly to underpin a range of different events, values and relationships.

This autological ontology was present again, albeit less obviously, in Chapter 6. In Chapter 6 I described how participants in Dechinta Bush University attempted to resist the liberal state narrative of decolonization, and to enact alternate forms of

Indigenous agency and self-determination. On one hand, when fully theorized by professors and books, and legitimized within higher education, this was made intelligible within late liberal terms once again, and justified within the same autological instrumental logics of the Akitsiraq Law School. On the other, however, moments of disruption did emerge – not around a coherent critique of liberalism, but on an ontological level, between different versions and accounts of reality and its components. The efforts to combine the bush and the university led to conflicts around who or what would determine daily life between participants, especially when two governing temporalities rubbed up against each other. These conflicts exposed ontological inconsistencies and undermined the supremacy of liberal logics and actors. But it was not simply that two ontologies were competing – neither would have been possible without the other, and these effects would not have occurred without both combined together in these ways.

I now turn briefly to the spatio-temporality of the liberal ontology, as the participants themselves did around the chronotope of place, and which emerged repeatedly as a site of struggle. As I said in Chapter 6 and as is documented by anthropologists and political theorists, the chronotopes of late liberalism and place are at odds, and their specificities have resulted in a colonizing relationship (see Chapter 6 for a full discussion of Bakhtin’s “chronotope” [Bakhtin, 1982:84] and settler and Indigenous spatio-temporalities [Ingold, 2000; Basso, 1996]). The liberal chronotope ties a progressive, linear temporality to a homogenous, static notion of space – and privileges time over space. This chronotope rationalizes colonization *and* underpins autological action and agency. The place-based and Indigenous chronotope privileges space and makes both spatiality and temporality relational and contingent. As Vine Deloria Jr argues “...a singular difficulty faces peoples of Western European heritage in making a transition from thinking in terms of time to thinking in terms of space”(Deloria Jr 2003:62; see Chapters 1 and 6 for further discussion). At sites of colonization, these two sets of spatio-temporal logics interrelate, and the former reorganizes the latter. Whereas Bakhtin’s (1982) chronotopes were closed circuits, at Dechinta and Akitsiraq they can be seen to interact and as fragmented. It was never my intention going into this research that space and time would play such central roles, but no thesis about either of these

projects could avoid them. I feel compelled to center them here because the actors in my project do – and, having done so, because they illuminate and problematize some crucial aspects of the problem of agency.

When these chronotopes are centered, objects and ideas can be seen to travel between them, and agency appears differently within each. For example, Indigeneity understood in the liberal chronotope appears, in Akitsiraq's interactions with the state, as a static and temporally defined object. When Indigeneity is constituted in the chronotope of place, however, it is a spatial and relational happening. Because both involve the same word, conceived in two different realities, ambiguity becomes possible again. Dechinta, understanding Indigeneity around place, can appeal to state funding related to the same word conceived liberally. Dechinta participants might be fully aware of this difference, but strategically exploit it. (Strategic exploitation links back to autological action here again in another "circuit").

Similarly, by intervening in governmental knowledge on this ontological level, both Dechinta and Akitsiraq were often able to side-step full endorsement or rejection of something called 'the state' or 'liberalism' as wholes. Instead, they variously engaged and reworked the logics of these larger concepts in micro spatio-temporal and ontological practices. Conversely, centering time, space and their relations has also enabled me to point out where liberal logics persist despite claims to reject them. 'De'-colonization and 're'-conciliation, for example, sit linguistically with the same linear, temporal logics and realities of the settler colonialism that these movements are attempting to resist, and from which space is (in many contexts) absent. The ontological multiplicity and struggles I encountered in my fieldwork therefore pointed to anti-colonial and anti-liberal forms of political action. They also pointed to ways of situating and understanding existing practices in relation to the late liberal chronotope of which they are part.

Centering ontology in this way illuminates new corners and possibilities of the politics of decolonization not only between logics of action, but within them. The authentic Indigenous subject and culture in the resurgence paradigm can be seen sometimes to have the same fixed, essential, temporal qualities of that in settler-

colonialism. As I argued in Chapter 5, even “self-conscious cultural traditionalism” (Alfred and Corntassel, 2005:611) or strategic essentialism (Spivak, 1990), still assume a liberal subject who can act strategically. Even when resurgence scholars assert the spatial and dynamic natures of Indigeneity, they sometimes fix the nature of the state through a liberal ontology again. That is, they understand the state as always, everywhere inherently colonial and as an actor with intention in itself. Conversely, the constitutional approach avoids these problems with a discursive ontology of both the state and Indigeneity but in doing so risks neutralizing and dehistoricizing the state as an infinitely malleable tool once again. Malleable, that is, by an Indigenous actor who is separable and instrumental in her engagement with the state. Even the most nuanced approaches, like Henderson’s (1994) treaty-federalism and Ladner’s (2009) multiple legal orders, still seem to assume an autonomous individual, capable of standing outside those orders or moving between by rational choice and will. This last point is a recurrent theme from my fieldwork: a liberal way of choosing the non-liberal. The ontology and chronotope of liberal agency have therefore crept into both paradigms, even in the moments that they denounced it.

My aim here is not to analyze any single approach to decolonization but to show that centering ontology and spatio-temporality helps situate any approach in relation to its broader late liberal and settler colonial contexts. Ontology and spatio-temporality are lenses and questions through which we might extend our understanding of colonization, decolonization and liberalisms. Late liberal and settler-colonial ontologies and spatio-temporalities are aligned and intersecting. Studies of this alignment and intersection, such as the current thesis, are necessary for understanding both late liberalism and settler-colonialism. For those concerned with acting against liberal or colonizing versions of politics, ontology and spatio-temporality also offer practical sites of intervention into governing logics, as they did for participants in Dechinta. In the next section I consider the implications of all this for imagining post-liberal agency more broadly.

## 7.3 Imagining post-liberal agency

In this final section of the thesis I return to the theoretical problem and literature with which I began the thesis. The account I have given in this thesis offers, I argue, a way of understanding, navigating and reworking the dilemmas for political agency that characterize late liberalism. These problems arise when we attempt to imagine agency beyond its liberal heritage, or to act against liberalisms when liberalisms set the conditions for action itself. These dilemmas are, as I described in Chapters 1 and 2, five sets of related ways of understanding and responding to liberal agency: as heterogeneous and/or persistent, as mythological and/or creating effects, as inescapable and/or incommensurable with existing alternatives, from within and/or against and as resistance and/or positive action. Most of this thesis has been concerned with how Northern educators navigate these either/or questions in multiple, relational and dynamic ways, as well as on the levels of ontology and spatio-temporality. In this section, I argue that the account I have given shows a path through the paradoxes of liberalisms more generally, and that this path neither fully refuses nor fully buys into the logics and risks of these five problems. This is what I call ‘post-liberal agency’. I begin by discussing each of the five dilemmas in turn. Each dilemma is, I suggest, reworked by the multiple, relational and ontological forms of agency I described in the sections above. I conclude by discussing their combined implications for researching and theorizing liberalisms and agency more broadly.

First, I have shown throughout the thesis that liberalisms are both diverse and persistent. This matters because, beyond simply being inaccurate, articulating liberalism as a single homogenous whole buys into its universal narrative and risks further totalizing it. On the other hand, treating liberalism as endlessly adaptable might miss its iteration across contexts, and as such also miss its weight and significance. Similarly, if we treat liberal narratives of political agency as deliberately malleable, as some actors in the constitutional paradigm do, then we repeat liberal voluntarism and autology (see Chapter 5 for more on creeping voluntarism, or Tully [2005] for an example of this approach to liberal democracy). These risks are the stakes that are attendant to how we conceptualize liberalism.

These stakes are, I have argued, the implications of that conceptualization of liberalism for the meaning of political agency. From my reading of the decolonization debate in Chapter 4 onwards, I have shown in this thesis that contestation over politics and history is often a contestation over forms of agency, and that making agency central and explicit can further and reframe such debates. I have shown that this contestation is in part a product of the simultaneous heterogeneity and persistence of liberal narratives of political agency. I have also argued that the ambiguity, ambivalence, multiplicity and dynamism I have described in the thesis are all ways of recognizing liberalisms' heterogeneity and repetition simultaneously. For example, I described in Chapter 6 how taking multiple or uncertain positions in relation to liberalisms, whilst insisting in the importance of those relations in general, enables actors to simultaneously engage liberalisms' varied realities and expose their contractions.

Second, liberal narratives of agency are mythological and theoretical but they also create effects and exist, somehow, in practice. In some ways, autological versions of agency are lies. They misrepresent all the complexities and contingencies of subjectivity that we know of thanks to scholars like Foucault (1982:77). In other ways, liberalisms *do* set the terms for action and action *does* happen in liberal ways. Many actors, myself included, experience liberal agency on a psychosocial level, despite an intellectual rejection of the logics of liberal action. This was clear from the accounts of participants in this project who drew repeatedly on liberal autology even when attempting to articulate some other form of agency. The liberal constitution of my and their very subjectivities is part of what makes liberal logics of agency latent.

Judith Butler's "performativity" which Butler set out in *Gender Trouble* (1990) and elaborated further in *Bodies that Matter* (1993), captures this problem. Possibilities for political agency are, in the account I have given in this thesis, brought into being performatively in words, events, environments, processes and their relations. I have showed throughout the thesis how participants in Northern education identified and enacted these possibilities in their daily lives. Yet imagining post-liberal agency, talking about it and claiming it are not necessarily enough to bring post-liberal agency into being. Participants' hopes and dreams for anti-colonial

action did not always match up with the realities which they recognized were operating around them. Narratives of ‘choosing’ to perform agency ‘deliberately’ rely on liberal autology once again. Choosing to enact a particular reality assumes a subject prior to reality and able to act rationally and strategically towards a particular future-goal. I returned repeatedly to this tension when it comes to theorizing post-liberal agency throughout the thesis.

I described in Chapter 3 how Butler rejects this “wardrobe” reading of performativity (Butler, 1993:21). It is not, she says, that “there is a ‘one’ who is prior to gender, a one who goes to the wardrobe of gender decides with deliberation which gender it will be today” (*ibid*). When it comes to discussing political agency rather than gender, however, it is precisely this wardrobe-like experience that is under scrutiny. I can argue against the idea that we can simply choose to perform our realities. I can reject the idea rationally. But I cannot deny my or participants’ experiences of something that feels like liberal choice. Nor can I deny the pull of ideas and experiences of liberal choice in the world. In fact, the idea that I can reject an idea rationally suggests that I can stand outside its logics. I have argued, however, that I myself and perhaps most others cannot get outside these logics. I address the problem of the ‘outside’ in point three below. Here, I mean to emphasise both the persistence and the circularity of this logic. This circularity is significant because it is generated by and illuminates the persistence and latency of liberal narratives of agency. This is precisely what I described in the third section of Chapter 5, when I discussed the logics of strategic action. This circular logic is also, however, a potential theoretical dead-end. Once again, we need some way of engaging the significance of this problem but not repeating its limiting logics.

This engagement is possible, I have suggested, in the very tensions and relations between understandings, articulations and existing realities of agency. In my reading, performativity is in part a theory of the relationality of language (broadly understood) and reality. Butler calls this relationality the “of performativity” and locates “agency” explicitly within that iterability (Butler, 1990: xxiv). Similarly, Foucault locates critique in the “the complex interplay between what replicates the same process and what transforms it” (Foucault, 1997:58). In this line,



transformation occurs not in the simple selection and enactment of desired realities but in the careful and discursively embedded relation of what is real and what is possible. This relation is part of what I have sought to document in this thesis. I have shown that the relations between the real and the possible can be multiple and can be ontological – and that these multiple and ontological relations can in turn be sites of agency and further effects. I have shown that the actors engaged in this thesis understand and navigate their own agency in these ways deliberately and reflexively. These relations are further complicated, however, when it is agency in particular that is in question. This is because the meaning of agency is so closely bound up in the meanings and operations of possibilities and realities themselves. These complications include the performative challenge of imagining forms of agency that resonate with but do not repeat liberal narratives of agency. They also include the challenge of identifying markers of possibility and reality that do not align with the spatio-temporal logics of late liberalism – and of doing this from within an academia that is governed by liberal terms of intelligibility (Povinelli, 2011). I have not resolved these tensions here but I have identified them and shown that they do not need to be resolved in order to be engaged and navigated in practice on the ground.

Third, the poststructuralist theory with which I have been working has resolutely rejected the possibility of an “exteriority” (Foucault, 1978:95) or outside (Walker, 1992) or “prior” (Butler, 1993:21) of power, discourse or modernity. This rejection cautions against attempting to articulate wholly non-liberal or alternative forms of political agency outside of liberal logics. It also means that scholars, like myself, are always already embedded within liberal logics themselves. Similarly, critics of essentialist versions of authentic Indigeneity reject the idea of a single knowable Indigeneity ‘prior’ to colonialism or ‘external’ to colonial influences (St Denis, 2007:34-51). Ideas about pure authentic Indigeneity (Indigenous people ‘outside’ of liberalisms) may in this line be colonizing ideas. The idea of pure authentic Indigeneity echoes logics of racial purity and are mobilized to disempower Indigenous people within liberal systems of power (for example Indigenous rights are legally void when the exercise of those rights yield financial profit, because profit is deemed unauthentically Indigenous [Shaw, 2008]). For these reasons, as well as due to the limits of my own location which I describe below, I have identified and

articulated aspects of post-liberal agency that are embedded within late liberalism, not ‘after’ it. I have also been concerned centrally with liberalisms, not Indigeneity.

Yet at the same time a full rejection of the possibility of actual existing alternatives to liberalisms risks totalizing liberalisms again. Many of the Indigenous participants in the current thesis spoke in a matter-of-fact way about the existence of other ways of being than liberal ways. To deny the truth of this speech would be to further deny and erase Indigenous difference in my account. Further, it is claims to incommensurable differences that are truly threatening to liberal orders. As Elizabeth Povinelli describes, late liberalism is precisely the form that “liberal governmentality has taken as it responds to crises in the wake of” challenges of difference (Povinelli, 2011: 25). Late liberalism works to make claims to difference commensurable within its own logics, through mechanisms such as cultural recognition (Povinelli, 2011: 319–34). By insisting that there is no non-liberal perspective, I would be buying into this relentless drive to make alterity commensurable or to erase it (see Cruikshank [2006] and Nadasdy [1998: 25–43] for similar arguments regarding academic knowledge more generally). Nonetheless, I myself am embedded in liberal contexts and, as I have shown, am as such am indeed unable to get outside them. This point speaks to the limits of the current thesis. It also highlights the tensions and challenges of imagining post-liberal agency from academia and the West. These tensions and challenges intensify between post-structuralist theory and Indigeneity in particular in the ways that I have described here.

Fourth, liberalisms are paradoxical. I have been concerned specifically with the paradox faced by actors seeking to act against or in-spite of liberal logics of action and therefore to act against the terms for action itself. I have called this a problem of ‘erasure or erasure’ in the settler-colonial context. The ‘erasure or erasure’ problem occurs when anti-colonial actors risk reinscribing the state or being assimilated by it on one hand, or being excluded from what counts as political action on the other. Judith Butler calls this problem “the paradox of subjectivation” (Butler, 1993:15). Audre Lorde calls it “the master’s tools” and “the master’s house” (Lorde, 1984). These differently articulated and located versions of the problem all threaten to close down possibilities for agency. They are, I have argued, theoretical traps. Yet

I have shown that they are also everyday realities for many people, including both participants in this thesis and myself. The current thesis speaks to this fourth dilemma, combined with fifth, most often and in the most depth. As such I discuss the implications of the current thesis for the two jointly after introducing the fifth below.

Fifth, scholars and activists have turned to ‘resistance’ over agency or even freedom because it seems impossible to articulate a positive version of agency without doing so in liberal terms. Resistance, however, is a negative, binary way of conceptualizing politics which always re-centers that which is being resisted. Resistance delineates a narrow set of possibilities for action. Certainly resistance or even ‘acting against’ are only parts of what the participants in this thesis understood themselves as doing. Rarely, in fact, did they report their actions to me in this way. Nonetheless, as I said in Chapter 1 I do not want to dismiss the necessities and strengths of the politics of resistance, particularly given the potential unknowability of alterity from academia. Rather, I want to draw attention to the implications of this binary thinking which characterize modernity and which haunts efforts to act otherwise to modernity, including to liberalisms. Throughout the thesis I have returned repeatedly to the binaries of liberalisms/otherwise and colonization/decolonization. I have encountered many others, including Indigenous/settler and bush/university. Again, binary thinking seems to present a trap for imagining agency beyond liberalism. Imagining agency ‘against’ liberalisms extends the significance and centrality of liberalisms by always defining agency in relation to them. Yet refusing or blurring lines of opposition risks blurring lines of action and accountability and, once again, it may be impossible to escape fully binary logics.

It is these closely related fourth and fifth dilemmas that the current thesis addresses most often and in most depth, although it necessarily engages the previous three dilemmas in doing so. I have been concerned consistently with these paradoxes and binaries, along with the problems they present for imagining post-liberal agency and the ways they might be navigated in practice. This is where the crux of the thesis is located. I have learned from participants’ own concerns and ways of engaging

these problems that imagining post-liberal agency must involve some way of relating to these binaries and paradoxes. Post-liberal narratives of political agency must somehow recognize the stakes and weight of those paradoxes and dichotomies without becoming fully defined or trapped by them. Similarly, theorizing post-liberal agency means neither fully rejecting nor fully accepting autological, juridical and linear-progressive versions of political action.

The post-liberal modes of political agency I identify and articulate in this thesis all involve attempting to relate to the binaries and paradoxes of liberalisms in these ways. I believe this is where the current thesis makes a key theoretical contribution. I have identified two related ways of working within or reworking the ‘erased or erased’ problem. These are the two foci of my discussion in the previous two sections of this chapter: forms of agency which are multiple, relational and dynamic and forms of agency which operate on ontological and spatio-temporal levels. Both these versions of agency recognize the significance of the five either/or questions described above. They both also, however, refuse to be fully determined by the either/or posing. They potentially engage or rework liberal logics of action without either simply repeating or opposing them.

One of the central functions of the multiple or ontological versions of agency I described above is that they often expose the contingencies of liberal narratives of political agency *in practice*, without outright dismissing them. Instead, highlighting and working from points of tension potentially enables a loosening and reworking of the knots of agency within late liberalism (this echoes Foucault’s [1997] critique, see Chapter 6). Conceiving of agency in these ways often also relates ambiguously or ambivalently to the binary of liberalisms/anti-liberalism. As I described in Chapter 6, ambivalence and ambiguity run disrupt the rationality of autological action, without entirely rejecting it. Ambiguity and ambivalence also enable ways of being which would be excluded were the paradoxes of liberalism to be ‘resolved’ in any certain or fixed way. Ambivalence and ambiguity are, for these reasons, worthy sites of further investigation when it comes to theorizing post-liberal agency (Breeze [2014] similarly calls for and begins a sociology of ambivalence).

In order to see and theorize agency in these ways I had to disaggregate ‘politics’ from ‘agency’ and ‘liberalisms’ from ‘oppression’. This thesis demonstrates the potentials of this disaggregation and of centering agency in this set of concerns. Even if our ultimate concern is resisting or transforming oppression, beginning always with an opposition or with a political goal often masks everyday forms of agency. This is especially true when it comes to looking for forms of agency which do not align with the autological equation of political action with goals. In this project, beginning with agency has shown that actors inhabit liberalism in multiple and reflexive ways. They are not simply duped or oppressed. Nor, once again, are liberal logics of action a single homogenous entity. This account was further facilitated by approaching agency as articulated and occurring locally, *in situ* and in practice. Again, this disaggregated and empirical approach is crucial even if our ultimate goals are (ambitiously) to overturn liberalisms’ dominance in defining political agency and/or to theorize agency beyond the specific. This is because it is in these ways that we can see where liberal narratives of agency break down as well as how they are being contested and reworked. In these ways the current project begins with and affirms Saba Mahmood’s call for conceptualizing agency empirically and apart from agency, politics and resistance (Mahmood, 2012:22).

The thesis also demonstrates, I believe, the potential of researching agency in this way when it comes to navigating the paradoxes and binaries of liberal forms of agency in particular. Mahmood’s approach can, as I have shown here, negate what Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick calls “paranoid” critical theory (Sedgwick, 2003:123, 123-152). Paranoid critical theory also operates around binaries, such as that of subversion and hegemony. Similarly, Louis McNay notes “the dichotomous logic of domination and resistance” (McNay, 2000:155). These binaries have a homogenizing effect for those events contained within their brackets. Saba Mahmood’s insistence that critical theorists research agency explicitly and empirically is one way, I have shown, to address Sedgwick’s critique of critical theory. By engaging political agency centrally, locally and in practice this thesis has created an account of agency that is far from homogenizing of liberal or other forms of political action.

Overall, the account I have given in this thesis offers one way of navigating if not resolving these five related problems. That is, I propose one way of theorizing post-liberal agency. Each of the five problems above contains one or more either/or questions for thinking about political agency in relation to liberalisms. Locating agency in the interstices of multiple relational forms avoids having to answer these questions definitively, but also recognizes their continued importance in limiting and enabling forms of political action. Ontology and spatio-temporality cut across all five problems, further illuminating and articulating each. Again, as I described in the previous section, ontological and spatio-temporal interventions offer ways of relating to liberalisms that are neither fully determined by nor outside of liberal narratives of action.

I want to close this section by re-emphasizing that what I am proposing here is not a single momentary snapshot of multiplicity or a single ontological practice. I am arguing that agency might be found in the ongoing and simultaneous process of interrelation itself and in the interstices of multiple modes of political agency. I am arguing that this multiplicity is not a plurality because its parts are not discrete and separable. Instead, its constituent forms of political agency are co-constituted, fragmented, unbounded and inseparable. At the same time I am not suggesting that merely the fact of interrelation is agentic. Rather, the specifics of this interrelation matter greatly. In this thesis I have followed interrelation between autological and alternate accounts of political action and between multiple ontologies and spatio-temporalities – all of which made meaningful, in this thesis, in their settler-colonial and anti-colonial contexts.

## **Conclusion**

The *shape* of the problem this thesis addresses, as I have outlined in five stages above, is not unique to liberalisms. Liberalisms are particularly significant in discussing agency, because agency is historically understood in liberal terms in the West. However, Judith Butler's paradox of subjectivation refers to gender, while Audre Lorde's master's house is racism and/or academia. These agency problems take a similar, if not equivalent, shape to that faced by those who seek to act against

liberalisms and the settler-colonial state. Of course, gender, race, liberalisms, colonialism and the state are all entangled. This is part why the problems they present for political agency present similar dilemmas. For these reasons, the current thesis also offers ways into rethinking and relating to the binaries and traps that constitute other modes of power and action – multiply, relationally, ontologically and spatio-temporally.

In my reading, the critical and queer accounts of agency I reviewed in Chapter 2 all dealt with iterations of this problem and shape. They also offered their own paths through in the contexts they were dealing with. For example, in *Gender Trouble*, Butler (1990) suggests subversion, parody and drag are ways of relating to the gender binary whilst also unsettling it. Foucault suggests critique (1997:28-30) and techniques of the self (Foucault, Rabinow & Faubion, 2000:223) are ways of reworking existing truths from within and working on the conditions of one's own existence. Cvetkovich (2012) suggested de-medicalizing mental illness, Weiss (2011) suggested race-based BDSM play, Halberstam (2011) suggested failure, and so-on. See Chapter 2 for a full review. In these ways, critical and queer theorists have long been concerned with imagining forms of politics beyond oppression and resistance. My aim here is to add a new account, a new path, and a new set of possibilities to this literature and set of concerns.

In my account this path and these possibilities are emerging in terrain of struggle that constitutes late liberalism specifically. I have argued that late liberalism is in part characterized by struggles not only over difference, with which Povinelli is concerned, but specifically over differences as to what counts as political action itself. In my account anti-colonial struggles are both central and peripheral to this terrain. These struggles are part of driving liberalisms' adaptations by motivating local neoliberal orders to adapt in this way. But they are also at its edges where it breaks down, becomes nonsensical or is challenged. The current project is a contribution to our understanding of liberalism at this moment in time, and the limits and possibilities that are emerging with it.

Finally, I have shown that liberal narratives of agency operate around specific ontologies and spatio-temporalities in everyday practice. This line of inquiry has

potential for further understanding liberalisms, as well as seeking ways to resist or transform them. Ontology is a matter of who or what can exist. To some degree, I have argued, so is agency. Actors and the realities in which they can act must exist. But in my account ‘too much’ of any given kind of existence sometimes closes down possibilities for agency. It seems that the instability and meetings of multiple realities might prove productive sites for further investigation and political action. This is true both in ontologically messy daily realities and in research, like this thesis, that seeks to take those realities seriously.

Imagining post-liberal agency is one way in which we might begin the task of locating and expanding possibilities for political agency or agency beyond its liberal heritage. I have done this through empirical research, in the settler-colonial Canadian North, and in the university. These are especially compelling but by no means the only sites for investigating post-liberal political agency. Imagining post-liberal agency is a way of taking seriously both the persistence and the heterogeneity of liberalisms. It is a way of conceptualizing action as more than resistance to liberalisms but not necessarily a complete refusal of them either. Post-liberal agency is a way of seeing not only the ways in which the paradox of subjectivation presents a trap, but also the ways in which we might act to challenge and rework it from within.



# Epilogue

This thesis is an account of participants' attempts to build new universities in the Canadian Arctic, to work with older universities in the South, and to intervene in academic knowledge and the roles of that knowledge in government and colonization. It is also an account of my own engagements with emerging Northern higher education and my navigation of the global and local academic communities and institutions of which I am part. The stories I have told in this thesis show, in my reading, that the university is a nexus of intersecting colonial and liberal political rationalities and practices. Both of these rationalities are widely recognized as governing logics of higher education institutions. The neoliberalization of higher education and the roles of universities in colonial power are both objects of large bodies of scholarship (Williams, 2013; McGettigan, 2013; Brown & Carasso, 2013; and Canaan & Shumar, 2008). The current thesis reaffirms these critiques and extends them through the Canadian North.

Additionally, the thesis shows that these liberal and colonial logics intersect. It shows that this intersection occurs in the daily realities of university life, including in research and in pedagogy it (I have borrowed the word "intersection" from Kimberle Crenshaw [1989:140]). In Chapter 6 I described, for example, how decolonizing pedagogy at Dechinta meant reworking the linear-progressive temporality around which late liberalism operates. In Chapter 2 I described how I also tried to resist those same temporalities in the research and writing processes, and how in doing so I sometimes undermined my own authority as a liberal subject in the university. Further, the everyday practices I describe throughout, especially those of anti-colonial actors in the North, point to some ways in which academic actors might begin to challenge this intersection from within it. The task of decolonizing research is ongoing (Smith, 1999; Barker, 2000; Davis, 2000). The question of what forms of action are possible against universities' neoliberal logics is right now being formulated. The intersection I have identified here means that these two struggles are connected. This means that those concerned with liberalisms must be concerned

with colonialism, and vice versa. Further, their co-operations in the university are more than the sum of their parts.

More than simply identifying the problem, however, I take participants' practices as indicators of possible modes of action. In particular, I suggest, scholarly ethical agency can be theorized as multiple, relational and spatio-temporal. Throughout the thesis I have described how I followed participants in combining and relating the multiple modes of action at work in the field I worked in. I have not, for example, blindly reproduced a universalizing, representative and linear-progressive thesis. I have highlighted my resistance to these norms. Nor, however, have I fully shunned these conventions. Sometimes, perhaps, I have felt unable to escape them. At other times I have chosen to engage them to demonstrate my own legitimacy or that of the topic I am dealing with. I have learnt much from participants in how to do this. I have learned how to be slippery, subversive, strategic and ambiguous, to work with multiple ontologies, and to maintain contradictions. Conversely, I have learned from participants the value of conventions that I had previously dismissed as techniques of voice, existence and action. Like them I have also seen and not escaped the tenacious and chameleon capacity of liberalisms in the most unlikely corners, including my own work. I have followed participants in looking for possibilities created in this relational multiplicity of ways of acting, rather in one line of action or another.

My own actions and reflections have, as I have described, involved persistent uncertainty, anxiety and movement between one interpretation and another. My aim in describing this experience is more than simply transparency. It is also in this experience and oscillation that I locate my own ethical agency: between one orientation to a practice and another, between convention and alterity, between optimism and pessimism. That is, my ethical and agential practices were not in doing things differently or in a bid for recognition and legitimacy, but in my constant juggling and relating of both these aims. This was not always deliberate and strategic. Often, when I thought I had got a hold on one, it morphed again into the other. My honesty can be read, for example, as a serious attempt to be ethically accountable and to expose myself. It could also be read, however, as yet another bid

for safety and legitimacy. It might function in both these ways, and neither might be possible without the other.

I wish I could stand fully behind everything I have done in order to produce this thesis. I am not talking about some dark secret here. I am talking about working with Indigenous people and communities in order to gain a PhD and to understand political agency more broadly. I have not resolved the tensions of working as a white researcher in Indigenous contexts, especially when that work is motivated by reasons that reach beyond those contexts. I have not shaken the sense that some of the stories I have told here are not my place to tell, or would be told far better by the people they involve. I do see many white researchers producing sensitive, radical and important work in and with Indigenous communities. This work serves Indigenous communities and many others. I hope some these things might be said about my own work.

Even the best of this work, however, contributes to the overrepresentation of white voices, perspectives and people in academia and in authoritative knowledge production more generally. This includes the production of knowledge about Indigenous people specifically and also about the world more generally. It also includes the production of authoritative knowing subjects, amongst whom I would certainly count people with doctorates. One of the many things I have done in producing this thesis, therefore, is to contribute to this problem. It is an uncomfortable thought that my work with Indigenous communities will be, in part, directed towards making me comfortable in this particular way. While I do believe the current thesis produces valuable knowledge of multiple kinds, I do not know if I would do it all over again. I still believe, however, that it is important for non-Indigenous researchers and non-Indigenous people more generally to learn from Indigenous people and to talk about decolonization. I have also now experienced the enormity and uncertainty of the task of working out how to do this. I have attempted to take one small step in this direction, but I suspect that the path towards this goal is not a linear one and might be littered with mistakes and regrets.

I want to end this Epilogue and the thesis as a whole with a call for further inquiry. I believe wholeheartedly that as academics and as people we need to

examine the possibilities for political agency that might be opening up in the shifting terrain of higher education and late liberalism. We need to ask this question in established institutions like my own, in newly imagined or created universities like those I worked with for this thesis, and in the terrain of struggle of which they are both part. We need, in my view, to explore further the links between struggles inside and outside of the university which, I have argued, are connected by liberal logics of politics. I have shown that the everyday practices of higher education constitute particularly productive, but by no means exclusive, grounds from which to ask these questions and make these connections. I do not mean to dismiss the more pessimistic atmosphere that, in my experience, characterizes much of academia at the moment. I think this trend reflects the ways in which the possibilities for political agency are narrowing rapidly and violently. This narrowing sometimes feels overwhelming. Nonetheless I am keen to find ways in which we might be optimistic about the situation. I take the current thesis as indicative that there is emerging hope and possibility, even amidst ongoing neoliberalization and colonization in academia.

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